

HANDBOEKJES ELCK 'T BESTE

THEO VAN DOESBURG
**DRIE VOORDRACHTEN OVER
DE NIEUWE BEELDENDE
KUNST**

MET 39 AFBEELDINGEN

UITGEGEVEN DOOR DE
MAATSCHAPPIJ VOOR
GOEDE EN GOEDKOOPE
LECTUUR AMSTERDAM

THREE PRESENTATIONS ON
THE NEW VISUAL ARTS

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

This is the first English translation of "*Drie voordrachten over de nieuwe beeldende kunst*" since the original Dutch publication in 1919. All page numbering corresponds to the Dutch edition. **Notes** can be found at the end of each chapter, rather than as footnotes in the original text.

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GESCHIEDENIS



HYGIENE

DRIE VOORDRACHTEN OVER DE NIEUWE BEELDENDE KUNST

HAAR ONTWIKKELING, AESTHETISCH
BEGINSEL EN TOEKOMSTIGEN STIJL

MET 39 AFBEELDINGEN, VAN
AANTEKENINGEN VOORZIEN

DOOR

THEO VAN DOESBURG

1919

WIJSBEGEERTE



PRACT. LEVEN

I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN PAINTING

Life is in constant motion.

We perceive life outwardly and inwardly.

Art expresses our perception of life, not merely the *external* observation, but above all the *internal*. The more this perception is limited to the *external*, the more superficial the art is; the more this perception is directed towards the internal, the deeper, more spiritual, and more abstract the art will be.

Thus, through the ages, art has realized in various forms the relationship in which different peoples stood to life; everything that people found in life, they expressed in their art. Hence, art has engaged with the highest truth of the peoples in relation to life. Because art has the eternally moving life as its subject, it is compelled to constantly change its mode of expression. This constant change is the *movement* or evolution of art. Art is continually in motion because life commands it so, and when it happens to us, as it does now, that we do not understand the art of our time, it is not because art stood still, but because *we* did not move with the art.

We stood still, and art passed us by: that is what happens to many of us in this time. My intention with this lecture is to bring you closer to the art of our time, i.e., painting, to show you how this Art for the Eye has acquired its independent existence. **(See note 1)**

To trace its origin would take us too far; we would have to go back to the Stone Age, something that might lead us beyond the scope of my subject.

I will therefore begin at a period when painting already had a history, in the 13th and 14th centuries, in Italy, with Cimabue and Giotto. In this period, commonly known as the "Primitive" period, painting had an illustrative character. It illustrated the religious sentiments of its time. Everything was made subservient to this purpose. Apart from a few portraits, paintings did not yet have an independent existence.

They were subservient to and in service of *religion*. They served this purpose, and everything was made subservient to this service. Even the primal elements of painting, colour and form, were subordinated to this illustrative goal. The "what" came first, the "how" second.

The subject matter occupied the largest place. Indeed, this is the characteristic of this entire period, which I would call the first great period: the era of *dependent painting* in relation to religion.

I do not wish to dwell on this for long, but I am obliged to mention it briefly to show you, in contrast to modern painting, how little importance was given to the painting for *its own* sake.

With Massaccio, the Byzantine tradition receded into the background, and the awareness of natural reality came to the forefront. Capturing and depicting nature became a challenge that would dominate many centuries of painting culture.

With this consciousness of reality, which persisted deeply into the 19th century, begins the second great period of painting. It remained literary and anecdotal, but only changed its subject matter: religious and mythological representation was replaced by the depiction of *nature*. Religious and mythological themes were still used, but they became mere *pretexts*; the true subject was nature itself. The goal was to approach nature realistically. The model became everything. The stiff and ethereal forms used by the early painters to express their religious feelings and the sentiments of their time were replaced by heavy, solid figures. Anatomy and perspective became everything. We

need only think of the difference between the figures of Giotto, Fra Angelico (fig. 5), and those of Raphael and Michelangelo (figs. 6, 7). In our own region as well, the meticulous study of nature began, primarily with Hubert and Jan van Eyck, who are still considered part of the early painters.

Gradually, religious awareness and devotion, which the early painters expressed with great affection in their figures, were displaced and gave way to an appreciation of natural beauty, to Realism.

The medium also contributed to this shift: oil paint, applied by the Van Eyck brothers and purportedly invented by them, replaced the old techniques of fresco, tempera, and other methods that were suitable for mural painting due to their significant effort and care required.

In the second period, the painting itself becomes more independent in *appearance*; it gradually frees itself from religious service (aided by subjects taken from daily life) and separates from the wall. Improvements in materials also popularize smaller paintings, a trend influenced by the shift towards painting from nature. Portrait painting also emerges prominently.

During the Renaissance, adhering faithfully to nature, displacing supernatural symbols, and choosing subjects from everyday life represented a revolutionary shift in artistic expression, comparable to today's Futurism or Cubism. However, it would become even more radical. Rembrandt, the Futurist of the 17th century, would completely overturn the primitive style of painting and meticulous nature imitation.

The essence of the Renaissance was consciousness of reality. This awareness introduced new symbols based on nature and science. Da Vinci, Titian, Raphael, Michelangelo, Correggio, and Giorgione transcended tradition. What they retained from it was the literary element.

Before painting could shed this element and become independent, it first needed to detach itself from the subject matter.

No new art form emerges suddenly; each art form evolves from the previous one. Together, they form a continuous chain spanning all centuries and peoples. Art is a continuous process of "becoming" and "decaying," never a static "being." This is because, as art shows us, life is a perpetually changing imagination. Painting is the ongoing visualization of this imagination.

The influence of the Renaissance was brought north by Rubens (fig. 8). He returned from his Italian journey with cartoons of Michelangelo's work — a blend of visual art and literature. Rubens admired not the latter aspect in Michelangelo but the former.

Rubens admired the immense anatomical structure and monumentality of Michelangelo's figures, and he brought his love for this style back to his own country with enthusiasm unmatched by anyone before him. As a preeminent painter, Rubens elevated portrait painting to great heights while remaining faithful to religious and mythological subjects. Though religious sentiment had faded from these scenes, it gave way to a passionate appreciation for nature.

Frans Hals, a peerless portrait painter, completely withdrew from religious tradition, despised illustration, and immersed himself in vibrant life, finding his subjects in streets and taverns. We all know his drinkers, drunkards, jesters, and fools. Thus, the triumph of nature over tradition was evident. Anything that remained hanging on was merely a *means* to an end, not the essence of art, which focused on nature. In all painting schools of that time, we observe a progressive move towards natural reality. In the 17th century, Velasquez in Spain elevated realistic painting to great heights. However, Rembrandt went even further. Not satisfied with realism in

light, shadow, form, and colour alone, he sought to depict himself and his inner reality, his sensations, on canvas. This *subjective* element was crucial for making painting independent. Especially in his later works, Rembrandt's art foreshadowed a newfound autonomy in visual art, unlike anything seen before. One of the finest works where Rembrandt's four main elements of art converge and harmonize beautifully is "*The Jewish Bride*." The four elements of Rembrandt's art are:

- natural reality,
- spiritual reality,
- light,
- colour.

Through the inner element, the spiritual reality, Rembrandt increasingly detached himself from natural reality, from mere representation. As the spiritual reality gained strength and prominence, not only in Rembrandt's work but throughout art history from its inception, the sensual natural reality had to retreat.

Among the naturalists who depicted only sensual reality, Rembrandt stands nearly alone in his time. Naturalistic representation had also reached its pinnacle in artists like Van der Helst, among others. Therefore, it's no surprise that Rembrandt's creations, where he poured so much of himself—such as "*The Night Watch*," "*The Jewish Bride*," "*The Syndics*," the "*Homer*" series, and others—did not satisfy the tastes of the public, raised on faithful imitation of nature, which demanded nothing less than a clear rendition of the subject, almost photographic in detail. "*The Company of Captain Frans Banning Cocq*" (often referred to as "*The Night Watch*") can serve as an example of such coloured photography. The artistic spirit played almost no role in it. Perhaps it still satisfies those with gastronomic tastes, who enjoy seeing people gathered around a table enjoying earthly pleasures; but as art serving spiritual reality, it was doomed, and with it, any painting that offered nothing but an empty subject. The leap Rembrandt made forward was therefore tremendously significant. For him, the goal of painting was no longer mere representation but the composition of light and dark (fig. 9). Nature, with all its content, was a means for him to express his creative consciousness. He found in objects a basis for the composition of light and shadow; they held no other value for him.

In the first half of the 18th century, nothing remarkable was produced that celebrated the independence of painting. On the contrary, painting received a significant setback in a backward direction. It returned to being illustrative and anecdotal. Classicism gained dominance, especially in France. Perhaps the only artist whose work retained a creative consciousness was Antoine Watteau. In England, a love for realism began to awaken with artists like Gainsborough and Reynolds showing their admiration for Ruysdael and Rembrandt. However, these developments did not predominantly advance painting as an independent art form. Moving further into the 18th century, classicism took very specific forms in artists like David and Ingres. Where Rembrandt had transcended mere subjects, the neoclassicists *made the subject the content of the artwork*. Painting suffered a loss of aesthetic value during this general decline. It reverted to its practical and illustrative character. We had to wait until the 19th century for painting to make significant progress again as an independent visual art form. The man who prepared the ground for the third and greatest period was Francisco Goya at the beginning of the 19th century. He was the strongest and most significant personality of his time. Even in his later works, we find elements that we see organized in the works of the Impressionists and Expressionists.

Through this Spaniard, the shortcomings of the 18th century were addressed. However, what truly propelled painting forward was the *French Revolution*. More than any other historical event, the French Revolution influenced painting. Interestingly, all major movements in artistic history have coincided with significant historical events.

The French Revolution ushered in a new era of development for painting on new foundations. The emerging ideal sought new symbols and found them in Romanticism. The classics, represented by the schools of David (fig. 11) and Ingres, opposed the new ideals of the rising Romantic movement. Eugène Delacroix was the foremost advocate of Romanticism, preceded in this direction by Géricault (fig. 12). While both were influenced by literary intentions, Delacroix exhibited a great sensitivity to compositional balance.

As the love for nature grew, the subject matter of painting became less important. With Courbet, Naturalism emerged in France, leading to a group of artists who immersed themselves in everyday life: the Barbizon group.

This group, known as the Barbizon School, included Courbet, Rousseau, Diaz, Millet, Jacques, Corot, Dupré, Daubigny, and others. Daumier, certainly one of the greatest representatives of the new spirit, could also be included among them.

The Barbizon painters formed the transition from Romanticism to Impressionism: the school of light and air, commonly known as plein-air art. They paved the way for the art of the future, abstract art, but first, the form of the artwork itself had to undergo significant changes.

Although still somewhat influenced by Romanticism, the Barbizon painters sought the natural and genuinely human, the universal. They no longer painted according to school rules but created based on their personal psychological perceptions.

Honoré Daumier (fig. 14) embodied the form and spirit of his time in painting and is considered a prominent figure in this evolution. He stands out among all others as the painter who pushed the Rembrandt principle to its utmost extent.

While Rembrandt saw the object as the form of light, for Daumier, the object became the form of the spirit. Daumier thus became the greatest precursor to independent, abstract painting—the immediate predecessor to Kandinsky.

Daumier understood natural forms and knew how to handle them, even ignore them when necessary, though the time had not yet arrived to completely discard them. This emphasis on the subjective thus came prominently to the forefront. The Romantic pose gradually disappeared as the Barbizon painters sought to embody the life of their time.

The theatrical postures of classical figures gave way to the natural stance of farmers in the fields. The classical noses of David were replaced by blunt peasant noses. Sentimentality yielded to genuine human emotion (compare fig. 13 with fig. 11).

David in formal attire, *Millet* in clogs—these contrasts vividly express the artistic sensibilities of the 18th century versus those of the 19th century.

Before I move on to the new phase of painting, I must pause to consider a phenomenon that persists to this day. At the Salon in Paris, where classicism predominated as it did elsewhere, the vividly alive works of the Barbizon painters naturally provoked great hilarity. The appearance of these painters and their works can be likened to the arrival of a healthy farmer in wooden shoes, smelling of hay, manure, and sunlight, among an exquisite gathering of gentlemen in tails and décolleté ladies with carefully coiffed hair, scented with perfume and face powder. The artworks of the Barbizon painters, inspired by real life and the works of Dutch artists from the flourishing 17th century, were thus expelled from the Salon like contagious pathogens.

Many rugged workers like Millet, Courbet, or Rousseau often saw their work quickly returned to the studio with the dreaded "R." (refusé) stamped on the cover, which spelled a dire judgment for any artist. Thanks to Ary Scheffer, a Dutch painter who himself belonged to the Romantic school, the "Salon des Refusés" was established where rejected works were exhibited. The interest in these exhibitions was immense. Following the stagnation of classicism, these shows acted as a refreshing plunge into the open air.

The second significant moment we now move to, which would profoundly influence further developments in painting, is the rise of *Impressionism*.

Impressionism extends far beyond its literal meaning. It isn't just about capturing *impressions* but entails a love for light and air, expressing feelings through lines and tonal relationships, and *refining techniques*.

Anything hinting at staleness was removed. Murky and suspect colours, browns, and blacks were banished from the palette. The object became a tone, and the entire natural world was seen as a series of tones. For the pure impressionist, a green apple on a red cloth had no more significance than a green next to a red tone. Thus, the visual element supplanted the literary aspects of tradition.

The object *itself*, the subject matter, began to recede into the background. Painting *evolved* into a form of art, and the entire natural world became a challenge of tonal relationships for the impressionist. Making the painting resemble this was their goal. The "how" became everything; the "what" became secondary. Or rather, the "how" became the "what."

The painting became the sum of visual tonal values, and the spirit, the subjective, was expressed through this painting of tonal relationships. "*Peindre d'après nature n'est pas pour un impressioniste, peindre l'objectif, mais réaliser des sensations*," [To paint from nature is not for an impressionist to paint the objective, but to realize sensations] as stated by Cézanne.

This impressionism, which played such a significant role in the entire development of painting, of course did not arise suddenly. Its roots can be traced back to the golden age of Dutch painting: from Hals, Rembrandt, Rubens, Vermeer, Pieter de Hoogh, and Ruysdael, and then spreading through England (Bonnington, Constable), reaching France (Delacroix, Courbet, etc.), and finally coming to fruition in the French painter Édouard Manet: the foremost and strongest representative of *Impressionism*.

The direct germ of his painting was already present in the strong colour contrasts of Eugène Delacroix's paintings. However, everything that was murky and posed, everything clinging to classicism in Delacroix, was removed by Édouard Manet.

The work "*Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*" (illustration 15) provoked hilarity, yet it was fundamentally a pure specimen of Impressionist painting.

Thus, Impressionism was born. Much later, this painting style found followers in Holland as well. It was the Maris brothers, Israëls, Mauve, and others who brought it to Holland. This Impressionist school triumphed gloriously and is currently diligently practiced by the former *adversaries*: the academicians, both in Holland and in Germany, and so on.

However, Impressionism did not mark the end. It was merely the preliminary skirmish of true painting. The great assault to entirely wrest painting from nature's hands and establish it as an independent visual art form was yet to come.

The storming assault began with *Neo-Impressionism*, which we can mention in the same breath as *Luminism*. This Neo-Impressionism, this Luminism, was born on the hills of Provence in the presence of the sun. The painters climbed higher and higher... they had to land in the abstract.

Neo-Impressionism was still bound to nature, primarily to light. It emerged in the last quarter of the 19th century, originated in France, and found its strongest representatives in Seurat (illustration 16), Signac, and Claude Monet.

As transitional figures from Impressionism to Neo-Impressionism, I mention Pissarro and Sisley.

Neo-Impressionism is also the psychological-chemical purification of the medium. Light was the challenge, and the palette was made to resemble light. From them comes spectral analysis. Only the colours of the spectrum appear on the palette. Working with complements becomes common. To give the painting the powerful expression of nature, the colours are placed next to each other unmixed. From this comes the pointillist method: pointillism.

Nature as a subject becomes a *force* with which to bring the painting into harmony. The representation becomes even more subordinate than with the Impressionists.

This Luminism reaches its peak in two prominent artists, a Dutchman and a Frenchman: Vincent van Gogh and Paul Cézanne (illustrations 18, 19).

Vincent van Gogh employed Neo-Impressionism in service of emotion. Painting, for him, was a task of capturing feelings through colour and form. In this lay the future of Expressionist painting, which we experience today.

For him, the object was an obstacle, something that didn't belong in the painting but had persisted through centuries of tradition. We can clearly see this in his artworks. Without hindrance, Van Gogh could have achieved the expression he sought. However, instead of destroying the forms, they ultimately defeated him.

We can say that Van Gogh died for "painting."

Cézanne reached a pinnacle of visual consciousness unparalleled in history. Van Gogh still harboured too much "literature" within himself to fully grasp the painterly value of the *plane* surface. Yet, conquering the plane was one of the primary demands for pure painting. It was the Cubists who, emerging from Cézanne's influence, ultimately conquered the plane. I'll return to this point shortly.

Certainly, this development didn't progress as smoothly as I've outlined here. There were reactions as well. Some questioned whether art was getting too close to science. Others argued that art and science should merge into one. Still, others wondered where feeling or emotion fit into this.

Among these counter movements that sought to disturb Impressionism, I mention *Symbolism*, represented by Odilon Redon in France, Toorop and Thorn Prikker in Holland.

On the battlefield of Art, various cries rang out: *back to the image; back to nature; back to feeling*, and so on.

Van Gogh and Cézanne were of paramount importance for the further development of

painting. Together, they embodied the essential elements necessary for independent artistic expression: Emotion and Technique.

In Van Gogh lay the seed for a counter movement to Impressionism, which later solidified into Expressionism.

"Expression" (l'expression) became the keynote of his work. Expression became everything to him.

Expressionism, which stands in *causal* relation to Van Gogh, was a counter movement to Impressionism. In Cézanne lay the seed for a complete overthrow of the division of the plane, the destruction of perspectival painting, a pure treatment of the medium, and ultimately, a tightening of forms—essentially a mathematical painting. With Cézanne, the mathematical temperament was introduced into painting. In broader terms, it meant the renewal of painting. Together, Van Gogh and Cézanne mark the transition from naturalistic to abstract painting *because they had achieved the utmost possibility of expressing the spiritual through the visual*.

One more step further meant the destruction of all elements that had held perspectival painting together for centuries.

The art of painting has sought its purpose across many domains. During times of profound religious consciousness, it visualized this awareness. In periods of social change, it embodied new ideals. Thus, it has always existed somewhat parasitically.

However, modern painting stands *on its own*; it must secure its own existence not through literature, nature, or allegory, but through its *visual means*. *Unless an art form possesses the ability to translate an inner reality, such as emotion, into an externally perceptible reality through its expressive means, it lacks autonomy. And because art must be autonomous, without this capability, it cannot truly be Art.*

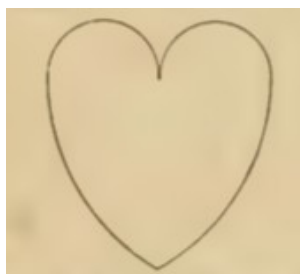
Music, regarded as the highest expression of feeling, was far ahead of painting in terms of expression. In music, the goal is to directly convert a feeling, stirred by life, into sounds. Music does not aim to replicate natural scenes, sounds, or anything else. When it does so — and I acknowledge such music exists — it is always *impure*, i.e. *not purely spiritual*. So, is it any wonder that painting also desires to cast off this burden — nature — or, as I previously wrote, "to finally cast away its crutches and walk alone"?

Going alone is dangerous, I know it well. Something must replace nature, and we will soon see what that is.

For now, let's explore how painting has achieved this. Nature itself has provided art with the means. It's a fact, borne out by years of my own work and study, that those who study nature closely and attentively, capturing all its variability, ultimately arrive at *style*.

Nature eventually becomes a *concept*, and *concept is style*.

Let me explain: if I draw a heart,



everyone knows it represents a heart. According to *nature*, it's not a heart; no one who recognizes this symmetrical shape would say it's like a natural heart. Yet everyone, even a child, *understands* it as a heart.

It's not a heart according to *nature*; it's a heart according to *understanding*.
It's the *concept* of a heart.
It is the *style* of a heart.
I could say, it's the art of a natural heart. There are more forms like these.
The entirety of nature is like this.

To prove this to you, I will briefly return, as promised, to the French painter Paul Cézanne. This painter studied nature meticulously. Finally, in his old age, he came to the discovery that all natural forms can be reduced to 5 mathematical basic forms:

the cube,
the sphere,
the parallelepiped,
the cone,
the pyramid.

It is remarkable to note how children sometimes instinctively depict the correct understanding of forms, the abstract shape of what they have observed, on fences and walls. This is because their sense of form is still unspoiled, pure, and simple, not yet tainted by schools and academies where a form is imposed on them that has nothing to do with the instinctive abstract form they perceive. For the modern artist, what Christ said holds true: 'Become like little children if you want to enter the kingdom of heaven.'

From this reduction to mathematical forms, *Cubism* was born.

The name 'Cubism' was first used mockingly by opponents of the movement in 1908. In fact, nearly all the names of the major art movements were coined in this way. The conservatives also mockingly named the modernists 'Impressionists,' 'Neo-Impressionists,' and 'Pointillists.'

The identity of the first historical Cubist is less important. According to Guillaume Apollinaire, it was the French painter Dérain; others claim it was the Spanish painter Picasso (see figure 21). It is said that under the influence of Polynesian sculptures, Picasso began to geometrize his models. In this manner, he separated the *artistic* form from the natural form and removed the illusion of nature from the image. He had already long rejected perspective, that 'miserable trick of trompe-l'œil' as modern French artists call it; indeed, the French painter Henri Matisse had already done so before him. (In Japan, perspective had already been avoided in the 14th century by Korehisa of the national Tosa school).

Cubist literature distinguishes three different types of Cubism:

1. Physical or natural Cubism;
2. Orphic Cubism;
3. Intuitive Cubism.

Physical or *natural* Cubism was represented by Dérain, Braque, Delaunay, and others. It includes visual elements of perception and is tied to the object. This art can be called rhythmic painting.

Orphic Cubism accepts objects only through emotion and constructs the objective forms according to supernatural imagination, that is, it spiritualizes them.

Intuitive Cubism represents objects merely as abstract relationships. Cubism means expressing in painting the mathematical *order* and *relationships* of *size*, *weight*, and *volume* of objects. This applies mainly to physical Cubism.

Additionally, Cubism seeks to replace the natural depiction of things with the concept of things; it aims for the destruction of objects as far as they are optically naturalistically perceptible.

It aims to bring forth the hidden rhythm from within things. This is primarily the goal of Orphic Cubism.

Through Cubism, the painting becomes a resemblance of relationships. colour recedes to the background. Cubism is more concerned with a new conception of forms, or rather, a radical destruction of natural illusion. From Cubism arises another movement: *Futurism*. This group of Italian painters, though still connected to Cubism, attempts to react against it. They strive to depict the multiplicity and versatility of objects in space and time, including objects in motion. They aim to capture this not only from visual perception but also, and primarily, from sensational perception.

The 20th century opens with these movements intertwined in a jumble. The enthusiastic manifestos of the futurists are well-known to us. They can be summarized briefly as follows: that speed and every form of violence, especially war, reveal the highest beauty, and that art should embody only the action of violence and cruelty.

"We want to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and rashness." (Article 1)

"We want to praise war — the only hygiene of the world — militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of the anarchists, the beautiful ideas that kill, and contempt for woman." (Article 9)

"And finally, contempt for woman." (Article 17)

Their works revealed few new perspectives. Futurism encompassed elements of luminism, expressionism, cubism, synchronism, and more.

The principal representatives of this school were Gino Severini (image 22), Russolo, Carra, and Boccioni.

The Futurist movement extends its influence across all forms of art: music, painting, poetry, literature, sculpture, and architecture. Futurism embodies the aspiration to build the future on principles distinct from those on which the past was founded. It was a punch in the face to all classical and quasi-modern art movements. "Where are the men with their carbolic-scented fingers... set museums on fire. Let them float your glorious statues... Museums... they are cemeteries where the spirit is stifled on a funeral urn. We want to purify the world of all utilitarian, humanistic endeavours; of guides and professors, etc., etc." This is their outcry. They demand the downfall of old intelligence, of the entire past, based on modern technological progress: cinema, airplanes, automobiles, etc.

In some respects, they are correct. Their pride is justified by the new realization that emerges in art: that art and nature are two different concepts. If art's purpose, or rather its task, had been to copy nature as accurately as possible, then cinema, apart from colour, would have been the pinnacle of achievement. After all, cinema provides us with everything that ancient painters sought: plasticity, perspective, natural movement, and so on. And yet, this technical invention has absolutely nothing to do with art.

The advent of the cinematic image naturally influenced artistic energy and made painters realize that their domain was *far removed from the portrayal of nature*.

One of the most important trailblazers who destroyed the illusion of nature as a painterly element and thus liberated painting from tradition was the Russian Wassily Kandinsky.

From the colour impressions of his early years to the famous "*Composition 6*" (image 23), his life was dedicated to painting. He beautifully narrates this in his autobiography.

It is beyond the scope of my intention to delve into his entire life in detail.

In brief:

Kandinsky was born into a noble Russian family, destined for science, and engaged in various disciplines such as economics, Roman law, ethnography, etc. Leading an artist's life seemed to him limitless happiness. Above all, he cherished pure abstract thinking. He viewed science solely from an artist's perspective.

Characteristic of his artistic nature is when he recounts how, as an ethnographer and jurist, he was sent by the Royal Society of Anthropology and Ethnography to the Governorate of Vologda, where he was enthralled by the picturesque nature of the peasants. His tasks included uncovering the fundamental principles of primitive law among Russian peasant communities and gathering the slowly vanishing remnants of their pagan religion among fishing and hunting tribes.

"I still remember how I entered their hut for the first time and stood on the threshold, amazed by the unexpected images. The table, the benches, the significant large oven typical of Russian peasant dwellings, the walls, and every object were painted with colourful, rough ornaments. On the walls: folk scenes, a symbolic hero, a battle, or a painted folk song. In one corner, filled with holy images, hung a red-burning hanging lamp, which glowed and blossomed like a modestly speaking and self-living, proud star. Finally, when I entered the room, I felt surrounded from all sides by the painting into which I had stepped."

From this simple event stems his principle: the viewer should *not stand before the painting but within it*.

Kandinsky painted according to many methods, and he was deeply disappointed when he realized once that he was working according to the Rembrandt principle.

Two things struck him the most: a painting by the Luminist Monet and a performance of "Lohengrin" by R. Wagner. In the first instance, it was a painting of a haystack that deeply affected him. Although he was initially completely enchanted by the high harmony of colours, upon closer inspection, he could not extract nature, the subject, from the image. This irritated him, but when he found out from the catalog which *object* had brought him such delight, the charm of the *painting* was much less. He understood that the painting "in itself" had charmed him. "It was," he says himself, "the first time I saw a *painting*."

In the performance of "Lohengrin," it was the *painterly* element that struck him. The powerful sound: the violin, the deep bass tones, and especially the wind instruments embodied for him the entire powerful colour, as he knew it when the sun set over Moscow.

"I saw all my colours in my mind, they stood before my eyes. Wild lines drew themselves before me."

"Then it became clear to me that art in general is much more powerful than it seemed to me,

that painting also possesses such powers as music, can develop."

Making painting as powerful as music became his task.

His entire body of work is the slow development of this abstract painting. Each of his works indicates a stage of this development. Although in earlier times he still recognized the object as the support of the artwork, we gradually see him detach from the object. But not like the *Cubists*. Each tightening of form, the ornamental, systematic treatment of planes was hostile to him.

Rembrandt made a deep impression on him. He cared little for Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, and their light and air problems, although the Luminists, especially Monet, the most powerful representative, interested him greatly. Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh also showed him the way to what he himself calls the "Goal of Painting."

I will tell you a small anecdote about how, by chance, he achieved this goal.

At dusk, he enters his studio. He comes from a plein-air ["in the open air" or outdoors] study, with his painting box in hand, still lost in what he has seen, still absorbed in the problem of colour and power. Suddenly, he is struck by an indescribable beauty. He sees in his studio a painting suffused with inner glow and wonders if he painted it. The charm was extraordinary. He approaches the mysterious wonder, seeing nothing but forms and colours without seeing what it actually represented, as it was placed on its side against the wall! Soon, disillusionment follows: it was a painting that stood on its side against the wall! He tries the next morning to regain the enchanting impression, but in vain; he is constantly distracted by the representation, by "Nature in the image."

Then he suddenly knew what pure art impression harmed: *nature*, and with all his might, he tore nature out of the painting.

Perhaps you have experienced it as Kandinsky did. You stroll and suddenly your sense of beauty is awakened by a colour or a shape and you cannot quite identify *what* it is. You approach closer, and "the charm is broken *as soon as you see what it was that fascinated you.*"

With Kandinsky, the third great period of painting begins: the abstraction of art from nature; the disappearance of the object from the painting; pure, clean painting: the expression of our spiritual emotion through the composition of line and colour. Thus painting became what music has been for centuries: the pure subjective organ of the human spirit.

Previously, nature served as a means to elucidate the Idea; the depicted nature became the form of the Idea.

With Kandinsky, Form and Idea merge, and we can say that the Idea is the Form.

In addition to being a painter, Kandinsky is an excellent writer and critic. He has expressed his thoughts in various works such as "The Blue Rider," "Concerning the Spiritual in Art," and others. In brief, he summarizes his ideas as follows:

Kandinsky divides painting into three periods:

1st Period: *Origin* - The practical period, art with practical purposes; portraiture, religious and historical representations.

2nd Period: *Development* - The gradual departure from the practical element, the

foregrounding of the aesthetic.

3rd Period: *Goal* - The attainment of a higher substance, where all illustrative or practical elements are removed: pure painting where the painting has its own essence, expressed in purely spiritual language.

According to Kandinsky, art, like any other human action, has evolved *from the practical to the spiritual*. He explains this to us as follows:

"When an ancient hunter, driven by *hunger*, pursued wild game for days, his action was purely practical. But today, when a royal hunter pursues wild game, he is motivated by pleasure. Just as hunger is a *physical* value, *pleasure* is an aesthetic value. When a wild person uses artificial sounds for their dance, they are driven by sexual desire. From these artificial sounds, which were practical tools, modern music has evolved over thousands of years...

When contemporary humans attend a concert, they seek not a practical tool in music, but aesthetic enjoyment."

Severini says that there is no greater danger than the confusing "isms" in art.

Therefore, now that I have reached my own time, I want to simply refer to the art of this time by the name: "Visual Painting", that is, painting as an *independent* visual art, in contrast to the representational art of the past. To make you familiar with the basic principle of the art of our time, I am obliged to say something about the art of a civilization that has been the Western progress for centuries, the Buddhist civilization. You all know, whether from originals or reproductions, the representations of Amitabha, Buddha, Bodhisattva, Kinnari, Shiva, Agni, Indra, etc. I do not believe that there are still people who reject these Eastern products of painting or sculpture, and the peculiar thing is that no one feels offended by the many arms of Yidan or the protective god, by the overly long arms or overly elongated upper body of a Kwanyin figure. Nor is anyone's eye offended by the sight of Surya, the white sun god, by the silver-white moon god Candra, by the red god of death Yama, by the four-headed Brahma, by the green water god Varuna, or by the golden king of gods Indra.

Indeed, all of this is nothing but expressionism; the expression or indication of the inner essence manifesting in an external visual form or colour.

In all these examples, we see that forms and colours are not in nature for the artist to mimic, but to apply in expressing a *spiritual state of mind*. Natural forms and colours must obey the artist's feeling and not vice versa. For example, when a Korean sculptor wants to depict a Kwanyin in a meditative posture, he is not primarily creating a *figure* but a *state*, the state of meditation. To express this state, he may take forms from nature and *use* them as he sees fit; that's why he is an artist. This free application of forms and colours to express an inner state is expressionism. A figure entirely painted in red, green, or blue can express much deeper the emotional state that the artist intended to embody than the externally observable natural colour. The question when observing such a figure is not whether such colours exist in nature, but rather, does this colour express the *spiritual atmosphere* that the artist intended to evoke with his work? Creation is abstraction: the concept of nature, the Spirit of the substance. When contemplating an artistic creation, we are primarily dealing with a *state of mind* and not a *moment in nature*. If a Hindu artist depicts the god Indra entirely in gold, he will do so out of inner necessity, because otherwise he would never achieve the expression of his divine worship.

Everything that modern art embodies today has been present in Eastern art for centuries.

Nature is no more than a pretext for the artist. His entire work is a strong expression of certain mental attitudes. When he deems it appropriate to paint a landscape entirely in red, yellow, or blue, yellow, and red, we must first turn to the artist's mental attitude. He freely uses the means available to him as an interpreter of inner beauty, out of inner necessity to express the feelings he experienced in such a case, and not to nature. If there is still "nature" recognizable in the painting, this indicates the artist's state of mind. The representation of an artwork is first and foremost a mental state that must elevate the viewer to a higher realm of life than that which surrounds him.

The higher the realm of life from which the artwork grows, the further the artwork will deviate from the apparent forms of nature. Eastern artists are fully aware of this. They even have a guidebook, the "Silpa Sastras," which includes ideal proportions and colours for their figures. Now, the artistic element of spiritualization is also penetrating the West, and the understanding that *colour and form* are emotional elements entirely separate from nature is gaining ground in art.

This understanding did not arise suddenly, but grew slowly. In our case, Impressionism was already a beginning. With Expressionism, which I also include Kandinsky's art in, we reach a higher realm of perception. In the future lies pure, abstract representation: the painting that no longer relies on natural incidents, but brings the artist's inner vision to the surface through compositions of colour and form. Therefore, when we stand before a visual artwork, we must direct ourselves to the mental attitude that becomes an organism through colour and form. The mistake we always make when viewing subjective modern artworks lies in this: that we have taken nature as the measure for our artworks. We must now overcome this mistake by measuring artworks based on their organic unity. Organic unity is based on three fundamental elements:

- I. the state of mind or the emotion;
- II. colour;
- III. Form.

Painting, conceived as visual art, is nothing more than *finding the right balance* between these three fundamental elements.

We see, therefore, that in this organic unity, nature can be completely eliminated, and that a purely visual artwork is free from all elements of nature and also free from sentiment.

In our daily lives, there are also moments when inner necessity makes us expressionists. When we witness a crowd of people at a fire or another accident, we come home and say, "it was *black* with people." In this blackness, the entire *reality* dissolves. This blackness is an example of linguistic expressionism that, although different in degree, is the *same* as the golden Indra, the green water god, or the silver-white moon god of Hindu artists. For them, as for today's modern artists, colour and form were symbols of the inner self. We could also call this expressionism exaggeration; rightly, Auguste Rodin says that art begins with exaggeration. Thus, Michelangelo exaggerated form, Rembrandt light, and Van Gogh colour. But a time will come, it has already begun, when exaggeration will be understood as the principle of all styles; a time will come when the understandable will be preferred over the natural in art, which will be the time of the greatest European style, the monumental, universally religious style, into which we are imperceptibly transitioning in our time.

When we understand the periodic coherence of the various stages of development in painting, we can identify three very significant movements.

- I. The desire to capture the visually perceptible.
- II. The desire to capture the spiritual through the visually perceptible.
- III. The desire to depict the spiritual directly through the relationship of form and colour.

In Germany, where painting, apart from Grünewald and Dürer, did not make great strides, a new artistic consciousness manifested itself in the works of Franz Marc. Holland, which fully expressed itself in every period of its recovering artistic consciousness, has gained a positive position in Piet Mondrian, Huszar, v. d. Leek, and others, and it is foreseeable that once industrial art and architecture turn to the new European painting, they will conquer a lasting style through collaboration with other arts (figs. 24-30). And with this, I hope to have provided you, albeit very briefly, with an image of painting and its development, thereby bringing you closer to an appreciation of a period in the history of art that will one day be referred to as the great reformation.

I have spoken.

Utrecht, October 30, 1915.

NOTES:

1) When I say that this is the era of painting, it means that painting is leading in the aesthetic evolution of the present.

2 Here, it is understood as a principle within the bounds of the external appearance of things. The consequence: disinterested beauty through the destruction of this external appearance (without the religious, symbolic associations) has never been accepted by them. Therefore, Western art, in spiritual significance, has surpassed Eastern art.

II. THE AESTHETIC PRINCIPLE OF MODERN VISUAL ART

In this era, much is spoken and written about Visual Art. Daily, publications on this subject appear, and art scholars and critics endeavor to provide detailed reports on every exhibition. These reviews are printed in daily, weekly, and monthly magazines in a special section dedicated to Visual Art. Visual Art, in this context, refers to painting, with sculpture as its adjunct. Why is it that architecture is not addressed in this section? It's because architecture requires more specialized knowledge, and thus it is discussed by professionals in trade journals. Painting and sculpture require less specialized knowledge; anyone who has strolled through exhibitions or museums and viewed paintings is considered competent to offer a definitive opinion on painting and sculpture. Whether this judgment bears any relation to the principles of Visual Art is irrelevant, as long as one can discern what objects are depicted in the painting—such as pots, pans, chairs, flowers, people, cows, etc.—one can write about them without expertise.

When we read such reviews, which are intended to inform us about Visual Art, we come to the conclusion that the critics and art scholars of our time may know the term "Visual Art" but do not understand the concept, grasping the letter but not the spirit. Indeed, the widespread confusion regarding the concept of Visual Art is alarming. As an example:

An art critic describes a painting where the artist started with the figure of a woman. Instead of examining to what extent the artist succeeded in transforming his subject into a visual form, interpreting it aesthetically, we receive a philosophical treatise about Woman. The art critic categorizes the entire female world into different categories, discussing her virtues and vices, her passions and perversions. By the end of his treatise, the art critic has completely forgotten that he was supposed to be discussing Visual Art and tries to correct his mistake by saying that the painter in question is either an excellent or a poor painter of women. If the artist's subject is a cow, then he is an excellent or poor painter of cows.

The painter is considered excellent if he can create the illusion of natural reality using his paints, and he is deemed poor if he fails or appears unable to create the illusion of a recognizable reality using his paints. During the so-called Impressionism period, the painter was given a little freedom; he could also mix something of himself into his paints, something of his heart or his spirit. This was called "temperament," "vision," "soul," etc. Going further was considered improper. To attempt to evoke a spiritual illusion instead of a naturalistic one was the height of impudence. In this way, an artist would take a stance that critics and art scholars could not follow. Therefore, he was advised to return to his pots, chairs, flowers, and people. A painter had to stick to his craft, but what his "craft" was, was never questioned.

What it means to be a painter of people or flowers is, in relation to Visual Art, as obscure a riddle, as mysterious a phenomenon, as being a painter of cows, the sea, women, or landscapes. The only thing we can ascertain with definite certainty is: either the painter is not a painter of paintings, or the critic knows the word "painting" but not the concept and was viewing the work from the completely opposite side of the artwork as such.

Naturally, this leads to a catastrophic misunderstanding for the public. Catastrophic because the viewer's attention is focused on the practical-naturalistic aspects of the work rather than its visual-aesthetic qualities. The reason for this confusion is that the evaluation and discussion of painting are mostly left to laymen, something that would not be tolerated in any other field. Consequently, as the practical naturalism, the representation, receded more and more into the background and was ultimately completely overshadowed by the visual-aesthetic, art scholars and critics had less to say about the artwork because their standard, "nature," was no longer applicable to modern art. Eventually, they ended up cursing the new artwork. This attitude of people who

speak publicly about art has significantly contributed to the public, especially the Dutch, becoming distrustful of new art movements.

Fortunately, we have now reached a turning point where artists no longer consider it beneath them to speak and write about their own craft; in fact, they see it as their duty.

Despite the documents left to us by previous generations, the fact that such great confusion about Visual Art is possible proves my assertion that those who write about Visual Art, the lay critics and pseudo-scholars, know the word but not the meaning of it. For if they viewed the artworks of earlier times from the principles and requirements of Visual Art, they would not make such gross mistakes regarding the Visual Art of their own time. They would realize that what Michelangelo, Raphael, Da Vinci, and others intended forms the essence of the same artworks they now scorn, like the works of Picasso, Kandinsky, Archipenko, Mondriaan, and others.

The art of our time is not fundamentally far removed from the art of the Gothic or Renaissance periods. Modern art is causally connected to them. The difference between Renaissance painting and modern painting lies only in this: the latter has removed all elements that do not belong to Visual Art.

Traditional art was rich in apparent values. These apparent values (religion, literature, allegory, anatomy, perspective) occupy an important place in traditional art, often displacing the essential or aesthetic values. The task of our time has been to remove all apparent values from the artwork and replace them with essential, visual values, thereby making the painting an independent aesthetic product. By removing all incidental elements from a work of visual art—those elements that harm the purely aesthetic impression—the artwork will fulfill the spiritual need more than ever.

The question is indeed very simple when we consider the purposefulness of the artwork. Thus, when asked, "What is an artwork in the best sense?" the answer must be, "An artwork in the best sense is a product of the spirit that meets the aesthetic need."

When in this treatise the word "aesthetic" is used, I kindly ask you not to interpret this term in the dogmatic sense in which art scholars have used and misused it, but as that spiritual function which we call the emotion of beauty, and which is caused by the product itself and not by the representation.

To penetrate the essence of a visual artwork, regardless of its era or nature, we must begin by understanding the essence of the simplest objects in our environment. The essence of the simplest things, such as everyday objects, is determined by the function that underlies these objects. This function not only gives the objects their name but also their construction and form.

The essence of a chair is not constituted by the legs, backrest, or seat; rather, legs, backrest, and seat arise from the function of sitting. This function determines the construction and form of the chair. Thus, the construction and form of the chair are primarily determined by practical purpose.

All things are causally related to this practical purpose or utility. As soon as an object fulfills its practical purpose, thus being practically satisfactory, a finer element emerges. With the satisfaction of the practical need, the spiritual need gradually arises. The first manifestation of this spiritual need, in relation to art, was primitive decoration. The decoration responded to a different type of purpose than the practical, namely the spiritual.

The spiritual purpose is the aesthetic element, which not only coexists alongside the practical purpose but, in some objects, overcomes or entirely displaces the latter. Such objects,

where the spiritual purpose or the aesthetic has displaced the practical purpose or utility, are what we call artworks in the highest sense, such as works of music, poetry, drama, sculpture, and painting. These are founded on the aesthetic function.

Due to the nature of the function underlying them, they differ essentially from utilitarian objects, which are only good when they meet a practical need. Between these two categories stand the works that fulfill both practical and spiritual purposes. Works that meet both practical and spiritual purposes are works of architecture. These are based on both practical and spiritual functions. A building is good when it is both practically and spiritually purposeful, hence practically-aesthetic. The more the architect processes practical elements aesthetically, the higher the building will rise as art. This is the task of our time, and it is important to note that architecture in this regard shows some similarities with modern painting and sculpture.

The modern painter also strives to transform all practically utilitarian or material elements into spiritually purposeful or aesthetic ones. In architecture, a complete aesthetic transformation in this sense is not possible because the architect must always consider practical utility. Similarly, earlier painters were also bound to practical considerations. Julius II likely did not tell Michelangelo, "I want visual art in the Sistine Chapel," but rather, he probably commissioned Michelangelo to create a very explicit representation of Genesis. For Julius II, the spiritual purpose lay not in visual art but in religion. Since he wanted the power of the latter affirmed by the former, visual art was merely a means, not an end. Although Michelangelo, despite this directive, yielded to his visual consciousness, it does not change the fact that his art remained somewhat practically utilitarian.

Gradually, representation became subordinate to visual content, and if we examine the history of painting's development, we will notice that this development is one from material to spiritual purpose. The traces of this development are also found in our society. People whose lives are solely based on practicality can do without aesthetic products, while those whose lives are practically fulfilled will seek out art objects.

The development of painting has thus remained bound to religion, allegory, etc., retaining a practical element within it. Gradually, this practical element, which includes portraiture, historical themes, moral representations, etc., collectively termed "representation," was supplanted by the aesthetic element. The stronger the artist's visual consciousness, the more they subordinated the practical or representational aspects to the aesthetic.

Through the centuries, painting evolved from practical dependence to aesthetic autonomy in this manner. Only when a work of art achieves aesthetic autonomy can it fulfill its own visual function. Various works of traditional art demonstrate a longing for this autonomy. In my opinion, modern art derives its legitimacy from tradition. We find in the painting of the past examples where figures or groups of figures were subordinated to the compositional principle of visual design. This is particularly evident in the works of Raphael (see fig. 6). In the Louvre in Paris, the French painter Ingres' work "La Source" features a female figure occupying a dominant line in the composition. Rodin later adopts and applies this line or visual movement in his work "L'Age d'Airain." It is evident that the subject or nature serves only as filler for the visual form. Therefore, in such works where the visual principle is paramount and the subject matter is secondary, we can speak of a pseudo-subject. The subject—be it figure, house, tree, or any other—merely serves as a leitmotif. Due to the lack of a purely aesthetic form for the Idea, this pseudo-subject persisted for a long time.

During the Gothic period, the subject constituted an essential part of the artwork because the representation of religious sentiment was inherently linked to the visual form. Thus, the artwork fully satisfied the spiritual needs of that time. From the Italian Renaissance to the art of Paul

Cézanne, the subject is maintained but is no longer intrinsically connected to the artist's visual consciousness, hence becoming a pseudo-subject. In Paul Cézanne's art, the subject—regardless of its nature—serves as the leitmotif that accompanies the entire visual composition (see fig. 18).

After Cézanne, the cubists found the autonomous form for the artwork and removed the pseudo-subject. The pseudo-subject was replaced by visual proportions. The form of the artwork now arose from a visual principle, making the painting an organically independent aesthetic product in which externality (nature) and internality (spirit) were balanced.

This new artwork manifested in two forms: the "bound" form, represented by Picasso and his school, the plastic and flat cubists, and the "unbound" form, represented by Kandinsky and the expressionists. In both forms, the pseudo-subject was replaced by visual proportions. The subject served as the starting point, which could consist of a form or treatment derived from nature. This was referred to as the visual problem. Modern visual artists resolved this problem through , form, and spatial relations.

Just as during the Gothic period, the arch form in architecture arose from the arched branch, so from the rational, thoughtful contemplation of natural forms arose the noble or visual form. This form had long been recognized in the Eastern art world as the highest subject of depiction, explaining why the art of the Javanese, Chinese, and Japanese shows more character than European art. Compared to this Asian art, European art was found to have never had a specific character. It is only in this century that there has been a conscious effort to give art some character, and for visual art, this must naturally be a visual character.

The first to become aware of this was the French painter Cézanne. He began to see nature in a visual way and reduced its forms to mathematical forms such as the sphere, cone, parallelepiped, cube, and pyramid.

This marks the rebirth of painting.

Until Cézanne, painting was a process of working from the outside in, meaning that painters, starting from the external form and of things, increasingly sought their character. When the essence of nature, which in relation to painting as a visual art can only be the purely aesthetic or visual (found through the geometric temperament: Cézanne and those who followed him, the cubists), painting became a process of working from the inside out.

This is modern art, its essence and the core of its aesthetic autonomy.

In modern painting or sculpture, Concept replaces Nature; a tree for the visual artist has no other meaning than that of a vertical spatial direction, etc. It is only important for the visual artist how form, space, and relate to each other.

The activity of the visual artist consists in bringing the multiplicity of his visual impressions, the multiplicity of relationships, into an orderly and peaceful aesthetic whole. Only a work that organically arises in this way can be called a visual work of art and perform its aesthetic function unimpeded.

In music, the task lies in musically processing some given data.

In visual art, the task lies in visually processing some given data.

The first to become aware of the true meaning of visual art in connection with painting and sculpture were the cubists (fig. 21).

The cubist transforms the natural forms that serve as his starting point. By abstracting the natural form and bringing forward the mathematical, he retains the purely visual or artistic form. This is the spiritual. The spiritual is the inner. The inner is the aesthetic.

For the cubist or visual painter — because "cubist" is actually a nickname for those who do not imitate — the object is the argument of Space. Space precedes every object. Visual art is spatial art. For the visual artist, the object is the symbol of universal space, and just as the timetable of successive tones, combined into unity, forms the melody, so the timetable of time and space relationships of the object, combined into unity, forms the visual form scheme. If the timetable of successive tones in time forms the melody (the progressing element) in music, the timetable of spatial relationships forms the harmony (the standing element) in painting.

The visual artist has nothing to do with the material practicality — for example, knowing that the object is made of stone or wood. For them, only the spiritual practicality, the abstract, is important.

The visual elements of a painting must be arranged in such a way that they can perform an aesthetic function through collective cooperation. As long as the natural forms that serve as the basis for the painting are not aesthetically processed, thus remaining embryonic, there is no question of a purely visual work of art.

From this understanding that in a purely visual work of art everything must assume an aesthetic attitude, any artwork in which we find elements other than aesthetic ones — such as naturalistic, religious, or aesthetic elements — is impure, that is, lacking in character.

As long as we believe that the visual artistic creation must have a content other than aesthetic, a practicality other than spiritual, as long as we adhere to the idea that painting and sculpture are limited to more or less aesthetically depicting certain objects and would not be capable of working a given whole purely visually, i.e., to nothing but proportion, we do not have a correct understanding of independent visual art, and we will not understand the style of our time, the Style of Proportion.

The style of our time is characterized by a desire for greater abstraction. This abstraction in form or has been present in visual art throughout all times and cultures to some extent. After each period of naturalism follows a period of more contemplative observation. This observation is more intellectual than sensitive. From this intellectual observation naturally arises the desire for analysis. Concept replaces Nature, and the form in which the emotion or observation is captured becomes more spiritual, giving rise to style.

Style can only emerge through Nature; Nature must first be fully understood for a stylistic form to emerge from the natural form. To focus on form, we could speak of a sub-natural, natural, and supernatural form:

- A *sub-natural* form is one that is incapable of eliciting the illusion of Nature in the observer.
- A *natural* form is one that suggests the illusion and emotion of Nature.
- The *supernatural* form is the form obtained from deep contemplation, the universal or stylistic form, the aesthetic form, which I have also referred to as the visual form in this discourse. Only this form is capable of creating that spiritual atmosphere in which beauty is perceived. Naturally, the practical sense has disappeared from this, replaced by the spiritual sense.

It now appears to me that modern visual artists are employing such forms and colours.

Now, if we return briefly to the example used at the beginning of my presentation regarding the essence of the chair, where sitting as a function underlies it, and apply this to "artwork," and we ask: what function underlies the artwork in the best sense, we get the answer: the aesthetic function. The artwork must fulfill a spiritual need to be good, and it will be good to the extent that the aesthetic function can occur unimpeded — meaning without being disrupted by naturalistic or other elements in the painting.

Therefore, it is self-evident that the artwork will most effectively fulfill its purpose when it is composed of aesthetically refined and elaborated forms and colours (tightened form, deepened colour).

If one were to ask me: how does the artist arrive at these forms and colours, do they create them arbitrarily, then I would answer: they do not create them arbitrarily, but they arise involuntarily from their visual contemplation of nature.

If one were to ask me: what is visual contemplation of nature, then I would answer: it is — in contrast to the realists, who saw and depicted things in a materially functional manner, and in contrast to the naturalistic impressionists, who saw and depicted things naturalistically — observing and depicting objects in their universal-visual-aesthetic essence.

Just as the musician experiences nature musically, so the visual artist experiences it visually. Neither for the former nor for the latter does nature primarily exist in a naturalistic-practical sense. For the musician, nature has only a musical meaning, and for the visual artist, only a visual meaning. It is not the material property of an object that is important to him, but rather its visual spatial signification. Thus, a bottle is not (primarily) an object made of glass to him, but the bottle is for him the visible determination of a spatial direction.

Space precedes the visual consciousness. The visual artist arranges, multiplies, measures, and determines the similarities and proportions of forms and colours to space. Each object has for him a certain connection with space, is its image. A certain number of objects provide him with his form and scheme. With a continuously changing spatial scheme, therefore with a moving object, a time-space scheme arises. The ability to form from this a harmonious-melodic whole is the activity of the visual artist.

I believe that the same applies to architecture, and that the modern painter, sculptor, and architect meet each other in this visual consciousness; with the only difference being that architecture must satisfy not only the spiritual but also the material need. The foundation of a building is space. Therefore, the architect's visual consciousness must be based on the concept of space. The relationship between forms and space determines the rhythm and aesthetic value of the building. As such, the building is a materialized schema of space.

The points that connect the building — both interior and exterior — with space, we can call the visual form schema. The more those points are aligned with universal space, the more monumental the building will be.

According to the nature of the material functionality that the building must meet, the entire function — thus expressionistically — will be aesthetically resolved from inside to outside. Therefore, the exterior will naturally arise from the interior. Both will form one organic whole: the Building.

Thus, the task of the architect consists in aesthetically incorporating material functionality as completely as possible, without compromising the latter.

The modern architect creates from the practical function. This function belongs to the center of the building plan; from this center, he proceeds eccentrically in his artistic work. The construction plan arises naturally from the practical function. Only when the construction is harmonious does the aesthetic function begin.

Thus, the work naturally grows from material functionality towards the spiritual.

Taking into account that modern painting and sculpture of our time arise in the same way, and that the same visual principles apply to abstract artwork, it will become clear to us in which direction the visual arts collectively move and how they can complement each other reciprocally: in the aesthetic translation of matter through proportion.

As during certain stylistic periods the various forms of the visual arts collectively embodied a single attitude towards life — whether arising from Religion (Gothic art) or from Humanism (the Renaissance) — so does modern art project the desire and possibility of a monumental, collaborative art. This constitutes the common ideal of the arts.

The sentiment that must unite modern artists is the longing for a complete expression of the Artistic Idea.

It is interesting to note in this context that the visual consciousness of the modern painter is naturally led in that direction; with the destruction of perspective by the Cubists and Expressionists, painters reclaimed their rightful domain: the Flat surface. The conquest of the flat surface gave rise to the need to paint on a monumental scale: fresco painting in its deepest significance. Furthermore, it led to the resolution of the stained glass problem, which was embryonic in tradition and finds its full development in modern glass and light art. Thus, absolute painting finally finds its perfect expression in the full and formal treatment within interiors.

This treatment can only be fully achieved when the noblest of visual craftsmen of our time, those fully modern, are imbued with a comprehensive sense of style consciousness. The dilettantism of the half-modern, which now thrives so vigorously, will thereby perish.

Monumental visual art lies before us. In it, all forms of expression (architecture, sculpture, and painting) will harmoniously — that is, each individually benefiting from the collaboration of the others — come together to achieve Unity. Thus, Visual Art will experience an era of monumental-organic style, where the artistic prowess, through the relationship artists have with new artistic means, will produce the most beautiful harmony between material and spiritual functionality.

Haarlem 1916.

III. THE STYLE OF THE FUTURE

You cannot have failed to notice that for about a decade now, a different aspiration has been manifesting in the visual arts. This new aspiration has been expressed both in architecture, sculpture, and painting. When you visit the city of Amsterdam, you will see that the old, archaic Stock Exchange building on Dam Square has been replaced by a new one on Damrak, very different in its construction from the former. When you visit museums, it should strike you how much less interest is shown in the halls of old art compared to the daily exhibitions of modern art. When you peruse newspapers and periodicals, you will come across various articles on Visual Art, and upon closer inspection, you will begin to realize that public opinion is embroiled in a serious debate concerning the problem of the Visual Arts. This debate is not only taking place in your own country but across almost the entirety of Europe and even in America. Alongside the problem of national strife, this issue has gained significant prominence, at least enough to interest anyone who is abreast of artistic and intellectual life. Your presence here tonight, where I have taken it upon myself to brief you, as far as a brief overview allows, on the significance and purpose of the new aspirations in the visual arts, demonstrates your interest in this matter.

About 35 years ago, around 1880, a similar reaction occurred in the visual arts. This reaction is distinguished from that of our time primarily in that it was more localized and did not extend across all branches of art. It mainly concerned painting and poetry. Holland also participated in this reaction, and the artists who embodied this new endeavour (Vincent van Gogh, the Maris brothers, Kloos, Van Deyssel, etc.) have long since secured a prominent place in public appreciation. However, the reaction of 1880 fundamentally shares a similarity with that of today. This similarity lies in:

Purifying the visual arts from traditional influences, making them autonomous, and thus directing them into new paths.

I.

Art is an end in itself. This realization was first grasped by the impressionists around 1880, hence their motto: l'art pour l'art (art for art's sake). The role that art should play in our society is to cater to aesthetic needs. Indeed, alongside our material needs, humans also exhibit aesthetic needs, and art is the designated medium to fulfil these needs. These aesthetic needs are of a spiritual nature, meaning they emanate from our spirit. When art satisfies these needs, it is spiritually effective, meaning it gratifies our spirit. Therefore, if a work of art contradicts itself and assumes a meaning other than aesthetic, it is either impure or not a work of art at all. Such a piece may appear to behave like art but lacks true artistic essence.

These thoughts succinctly encapsulate the essence of artistic formation in our time.

II.

One of the main characteristics of this art reform is the awareness that the artwork must satisfy us for its own sake—thus not for the sake of its subject matter. The definition that art is what is made with the intention of evoking an emotion also allows impure artistic expressions. Whether a painting or sculpture evokes an emotion in us does not necessarily prove that we are dealing with a work of art. Indeed, whether a painting or sculpture etc., constitutes a pure work of art depends entirely on the nature of that emotion. Similarly, just as emotion alone does not guarantee that we are dealing with a work of art, neither does the artist's intention to evoke this emotion necessarily ensure that the creator is indeed producing a work of art. You might now ask me what intention the artist then has, and I would answer you: none at all. The artist produces a work of art from their nature, because their nature is aesthetic. There is no room even for an intention. What the artist

desires is that what he creates is according to his nature; that is to say, that the product expresses his aesthetic experience of reality. Assuming that his nature is aesthetic, his experiences will correspond to it and thus be aesthetic. With some comparisons I will demonstrate this and you will understand me even better where in the further development of my subject I use the word "aesthetic." I consider this all the more necessary, because I have experienced that different concepts are associated with the word "aesthetic."

III.

A painter experiences his surroundings differently from someone who is not an artist. When a gardener sees a tree, he has a different experience than a botanist, and the botanist in turn has a different experience than a wood merchant. The wood merchant sees in a tree a potential number of planks of a certain wood type, whereas what interests the gardener or botanist leaves him largely indifferent. For the landscape painter, all these aspects are irrelevant. It may even happen that an apparently inconspicuous tree, which the gardener, botanist, and wood merchant would ignore, captures the attention of the landscape painter. He does not see the tree as a botanist or a practical wood merchant would, but he sees the tree through the lens of art. For him, the tree is a question of light and shadow relationships, or of line, plane, mass, and spatial relationships. In short, his experience of the tree is aesthetic, and he tries to represent the natural tree in his own style to the best of his ability.

Therefore, it is never the intention of the artist to depict the tree purely according to botanical principles, but rather his aesthetic experience of the tree. According to this experience, the painter interprets the tree through a work of art, which means that the tree is recreated by him and this result has not only a natural but also a spiritual significance.

This is proven by the following example: if the botanist were to also make a drawing of the tree, he would depict everything he knows about the tree. This would result in a scientific drawing of the tree, which might be invaluable for botanical study but would be worthless for art. The musician, on the other hand, would relate to the tree differently from the painter in our example. The musician would be interested in what he can hear from the tree. For instance, he might experience the rustling of the tree in relation to other auditory and visual impressions of the surroundings. According to this experience, he would interpret the tree musically, meaning he would recreate the tree in a different form through music, and this creation would also have a spiritual significance.

I could extend my comparisons with many more examples. I could demonstrate that the experiences of a philosopher are according to philosophy, those of a mechanic are according to mechanics, and so on. However, it suffices when we see from these examples that the experience of the artist is of a different nature than that of the non-artist. From this, we can derive the proposition that the task of the artist consists in this: to interpret the world view aesthetically, that is, according to art.

Once we accept this proposition, it will be easier for us to trace the development of a pure artistic style and to understand the significance of the struggle currently taking place in the visual arts in Europe.

IV.

With a limited overview of various artistic cultures, the development of style in our time may seem somewhat bewildering to us. Coming from an era where style is expressed according to nature, we may not immediately understand the more abstract appearance of modern style.

However, with a broader view of past cultures that have known art throughout history, the modern artwork will appear to us as the form of the modern spirit of the times. In some respects, we will notice a similarity between the expressive methods of the Cubists and Expressionists and those of Assyrian, Egyptian, and ancient Indian artists. This similarity lies in the general characteristics that define any style; the differences are only of an individual nature.

If we start seeing style in this way, we are already beginning to break free from the artistic consciousness that has poisoned Europe since the Renaissance. I say since the Renaissance, but in fact, I should say since the Hellenistic artistic conception. As we continue our examination of style, we will immediately understand why this is so.

When we consult drawings from prehistoric times, we observe two directions. The first is during the Paleolithic culture (fig. 1), where the aim was solely to provide a clear representation of objects perceived exclusively through the senses, usually relating to hunting such as reindeer, wild horses, mammoths, etc. Due to a lack of deeper experience beyond sensory perception, the artist could only focus on the physical natural aspects of the animal. Therefore, we call this direction, where the artist works according to nature, the physio-expressive or physio-plastic direction. In the second direction, during the Neolithic culture, we observe a completely different type of drawing (fig. 2). The artist does not only depict what he sees when observing an object, but primarily, sometimes exclusively, what he feels and thinks during that observation. This gives his drawing a different, more inner spiritual significance. The artist expresses an idea or feeling in his drawing. Therefore, we call this direction the idea-expressive or ideo-plastic direction. These two directions run through the entirety of art and are also found in the art of our time.

Now, if someone were to ask me from which direction the future style will develop, I would answer without hesitation: undoubtedly from the ideo-plastic direction.

The ideo-plastic artwork is preceded by an idea, while the physio-plastic is based solely on visual perception. Now, it depends on the nature of that idea whether the artwork will manifest as a style. If the idea is aesthetic, the artwork will appear as a stylistic expression in an aesthetic form.

Once we have a clear understanding of these two directions in visual art, it will become easier for us to focus our understanding on contemporary visual art and its future development. We will come to understand that modern art is the consequence of the ideo-plastic direction in art.

Every style in art is characterized by the application of abstract, universal forms and proportions such as rectangles, squares, circles, etc. The artist consciously applies these as expressive tools of aesthetic ideas. Thus, in Assyrian and Egyptian art, we find the idealistic intention reflected in their strict and monumental forms. The sobriety, grandeur, and strictness of these forms, along with their precise proportions, are pure artistic elements. We can no longer maintain the claim that all of this is mere blind chance. It is all deliberate, and this consciousness is one of the primary characteristics of Assyrian and Egyptian artistic expression. Nowhere does the physical, the particular, dominate, but everywhere the universal, the spiritual, comes to the fore. Most purely, this was achieved in the general appearance of the pyramids. When we study the mathematical construction of the pyramids, the idea that Egyptian architecture and sculpture were intuitive should seem quite ridiculous to us. The pyramids, through their elemental form, give a purely aesthetic impression. The tranquility emanating from these surfaces in their mutual relationship is the hallmark of the aesthetic idea of those times. Like every style, Egyptian art also emerged from the deepest internalization of life. Hence, all superficial detailing remained foreign to this style.

The aesthetic moment is the moment in which, through art, we are in perfect equilibrium with ourselves and the world; the moment when opposing feelings of pleasure and displeasure are resolved. This moment is perfectly achieved in the Egyptian style.

A completely different impression is made by Greek temples and Greek sculpture. What immediately stands out is that the emphasis here is on the physical, the natural, or the particular. Knowing that the Greeks learned from the Egyptians, we must admit that the Greeks never truly understood the elemental spatial plasticity of the Egyptians. What the Greeks substituted for the ideo-plastic art of the Egyptians was physio-plastic art. Instead of rhythmic mass forms, they emphasized the harmony of bodily rhythm. Thus, the general (stylistic) proportions of the Egyptians were replaced by the proportions of the particular. The motifs used by the Greeks mainly expressed these proportions of the natural in the greatest possible variety, such as discus throwers, athletes, gods, and individuals in intense emotional states. These subjects strongly emphasize the individual and form the material for a physio-plastic artistic expression.

Moving forward, we see that from the Christian-religious worldview, Gothic art emerged as another ideo-plastic artistic expression. Here, the figure does not have a physical significance but expresses an idea and behaves accordingly—that is, it is more the form of an idea than a natural body (fig. 5). Comparing this artistic expression with that of the Renaissance, we see the revival of the Hellenic principle of beauty in Florence, reaching its strongest expression in Michelangelo (fig. 7).

The particularities of nature, the individual, find a very positive expression in the Renaissance and supplant the ideo-plastic of the Middle Ages. Not content with the physio-plastic of the Greeks, the Renaissance artists go further towards arbitrary exaggeration of physical forms in order to give greater expression to the characteristics of the individual.

The striving for internalization, for tightening of forms, for elemental proportions, is therefore absent in the Renaissance. On the contrary, a love for physical proportions takes its place, manifesting itself in the study of anatomy, proportion, perspective, etc. From then on, visual art continued to move in a physio-plastic direction. In the 17th century, this mode of expression matures according to nature, but in the 18th century, it becomes stale.

Yet, in every period of physio-plasticity, the desire for ideo-plastic art emerges. In the 16th century with Peter Breughel, in the 17th century with El Greco and Rembrandt, and in the 18th century with Francisco Goya. All these expressions remained individual; they had no influence on other arts. They did not become the general mode of representation of a people; they did not become a style.

Going further, in the early 19th century, we see a conscious imitation of Greek physio-plasticity emerge. These pseudo-classical works behave like Greek works but lack their essence and are therefore superficial. What defines a style is the immediate outcome of the spirit of the times. Therefore, a classical style cannot be transplanted into our modern culture.

Thus, we see that the Hellenic artistic conception, according to nature, has led through the centuries, deep into the 19th century. The artistic conception of nature was the necessary consequence of Hellenic and Renaissance physio-plasticity. It remained the model, and people sought in a work of art not the spiritual, the general, not style, but the detailed depiction of the natural, the particular.

In architecture during the 19th century, the same phenomenon occurred. Due to the absence

of stylistic consciousness but rather a nostalgic emulation of earlier styles, architecture confined itself to imitating Greek, Romanesque, and medieval styles. Up until Viollet-le-Duc, Semper, and Berlage, every fundamental understanding of construction eluded architecture. Sculpture lacked any elemental grasp of form, descending into individualistic mimicry for picturesque effects. Painting degenerated into hopeless mass production for the market. Architects and painters ceased to be artists, becoming savvy businessmen. So-called renowned painters received their orders via telegram: "Ten with trees on the left, ten with trees on the right." Dilettantism flourished, and a few genuine artists like Vincent van Gogh or Paul Cézanne either died in abject poverty or succumbed to madness from loneliness.

This state, which persisted into the early 20th century, was the consequence of Renaissance individualism. Attempts in the 19th century in France, England, Holland, and Germany to revive monumental art failed because their decorative tendencies lacked new content, and artists relied solely on a depleted tradition. What persists in our applied arts today under banners like "work guilds" is merely the morbidly individualistic, enfeebled remnant of that. Naturally, such "artistic forms" are unsuitable to encapsulate the new content of our times, the vibrant life of our modern culture.

Only from a healthy reaction against all these individualistic, degenerate expressions can a universal form, a style, arise. We have been experiencing this reaction for about a decade. It did not suddenly appear under various names such as futurism, cubism, and expressionism, but in painting, it was prepared by the two greatest artists at the end of the 19th century: Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh (fig. 18-19). They paved the way that we are now following. Both of them had in their art the seeds for a universal artistic form.

Cézanne completely abandons the individual characteristics of things and achieves great universality and purity of tone, a local tone. All objects, no matter what they are, behave in his paintings as tone, conforming to the local tone. His own personality plays no part in the depicted objects. He interprets them according to painting and not according to nature.

Vincent van Gogh, in some of his works like "My Bedroom," achieves factual colours without tone and a new understanding of composition. In other works, he achieves ideoplastic expression, where forms have a personal sentiment as content. With these painters, a new way of seeing began. In this new way of seeing nature, lay the opposite pole of Greek physio-plasticity.

The so-called cubists diverge from tradition and continue on the path they have embarked upon. They view nature according to art and depict the rhythmic succession of planes, balanced proportions, and interaction of depicted forms (fig. 21). They do not represent the life of natural forms; instead, they create a new plastic and independent life from planes and colours. With effort and true disregard for mass judgment, they search for the elemental means of expression in visual art within things.

Beyond the Renaissance and Hellenism, these modern artists extend their hands to the Egyptians. We sense an inherent similarity between them. And precisely this similarity in essence is expressed in form, with the difference that the stability of Egyptian art is absent in the cubists due to a completely different attitude towards life.

When the Greeks opposed the serene monumentality of Egyptian architecture and sculpture, they attempted to express Motion according to nature, i.e., in a physio-plastic manner and not according to art, i.e., in an ideo-plastic manner. Hence their preference for bodies in motion (such as the Laocoön group).

Although it is very risky to express appreciation for our contemporaries, I must truthfully give credit to the futurists for reacting in this century to the rigidity of classicism, which degenerated into formalism and dilettantism. They will indeed be remembered in history as the first to express motion according to art. The movement they take as the subject of their art is drawn from the dynamic life of large cities (fig. 22). Here, experiences are richer and more surprising than in the countryside where painters of the past sought refuge.

As an artist's experiences become richer, so do the problems become more complex and the artistic expression stronger. For example, large cities like London, Paris, Berlin, New York will produce a different art than smaller towns like Krommenie or Purmerend.

The content of our modern culture differs from that of earlier cultures, and where artists now work, a universal form of expression for this content must be found.

The universal form of expression of the zeitgeist is Style.

In every style, the emphasis lies on perfection, and just as we already find so many perfect forms of expression of the spirit of the times in progressing culture in other areas, such as wireless telegraphy, automobiles, airplanes, the most modern machines in every field, it would be remarkable if art were "backward" or degenerate. In all these products of human ingenuity, we see an essential similarity, a spiritual association. This spiritual association determines the universal form in which the efficient side of the zeitgeist is expressed. Similarly, we see that the aesthetic side of the zeitgeist, the arts, each carve out a universal form of expression in their own domain.

In this direction, at this moment, painting, sculpture, ornamentation, music, literature, and poetry are evolving.

What do we see happening? The content of our time demands a different form, and artists are searching for a form that is as pure and universal as possible. Just as in our modern weapons, in contrast to the stone arrow of prehistoric times, the raw natural material is no longer discernible, so too in the art of our time, nature is not noticeable. In our most perfect machines, materials, etc., raw natural substances and forces have been conquered, processed, and then transformed so that they assume an entirely new form.

What we see happening here in practical terms is also happening in aesthetic terms. The modern artist does not deny nature; on the contrary, he does not mimic it, he does not depict it, but he transfigures it. He uses nature, reduces it to its elemental forms, colours, and proportions in order to arrive at a new image through processing and transformation of the natural object. This new image then becomes the artwork.

The artist, no matter the time period to which he belongs, is not satisfied with a mere depiction or portrayal; instead, he seeks a transformation of reality.

At this stage, art, progressing through culture over the centuries, has now arrived. If we view physio-plastic expression as the stage of depiction and ideo-plastic as that of portrayal, then we must recognize modern art as the stage of transfiguration.

Although these stages in the development of art are not strongly separable due to the influence of one mode of portrayal on another, we can nevertheless assert with certainty that the stage of conscious transfiguration has now arrived. I say conscious transfiguration because I could demonstrate with several examples that among various primitive peoples, in connection with their ornamental art, one could speak of an unconscious transfiguration. However, this transfiguration of

heads, figures of humans and animals, occurred not with an aesthetic intention but simply as a form of symbolic writing or ornamental decoration of weapons, shields, spears, and so on.

Modern art has no connection whatsoever with this. Modern art has arrived at its new mode of expression through the development of representational and expressive painting. The process of transfiguration has its origin in conscious intent.

This cultivated transfiguration is the natural progression from the art of Cézanne and Van Gogh, just as their art is the natural development from Rembrandt's art and that of the French impressionists.

As painting and sculpture present themselves today, they are suited to form a unity with modern architecture (compare: figs. 25, 27, 29, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39). All three employ universal, not individual forms. Thus, with balanced application, one art will not harm or influence the other, but together they will constitute the general, monumental form of the zeitgeist: the universal Style.

It goes without saying that this style must evolve. It will appear when the moment arrives, when everything converges, interacts, and collaborates to achieve as perfect a monumental form as possible of the contemporary consciousness.

In architecture, we see new techniques being applied. These new techniques enable the construction of the most daring structures. Ingenious minds tirelessly strive to perfect these new methods. In painting, the pursuit of simplification and universality gives rise to architectural painting. This type of painting, with its abstract appearance, is suitable for forming a rhythmic whole with architecture. The individual easel painting ("tableau de chevalet") was unsuitable for this purpose because its chiaroscuro and perspective elements contradicted the architectural idea. For this reason, impressionism could not give rise to monumental painting. It could not collaborate with architecture and therefore remained confined to room painting.

The perspective landscape indeed breaks the architectural plane, but in the wrong way—namely, in depth. A modern flat painting applied to an architectural surface rhythmically breaks this plane according to the architecture, both in height and width. Consequently, to understand the significance of modern flat painting, we must see it in immediate relation to modern architecture, that is, in its intended place. In contrast to impressionistic painting, which destroys the architectural plane, modern flat painting awakens and enlivens the monotonous constructive plane from its rigidity. Imagine filling an entire wall with a perspective painting. Where does the wall go? Depth in the form of a forest, avenue, or landscape takes its place. The architectural plane is destroyed! On the other hand, imagine the same wall filled with a flat, featureless painting, designed to break or release the closed nature of the constructive plane in height and width—then the wall remains architecturally intact. The painting harmonizes rhythmically with the architecture, creating a balanced relationship between painting and architecture. This is not new—Egyptians also depicted objects in a flat manner for architectural reasons—but what is new is how this approach is being revived today. Therefore, it deserves full attention that contemporary artists have returned to a pure architectural understanding.

In sculpture, we see the same phenomenon occurring. The picturesque gives way to the monumental. The modern sculptor emphasizes balanced spatial and mass distribution. The concept of "sculpture" has undergone a change in favor of architecture. Like painting, modern sculpture is not the representation of natural form or a psychological moment, but rather its transfiguration according to art (fig. 29, 31, 32).

Thus, through advanced spiritual and material culture, the stage has been reached where the various arts are capable of uniting, each within the bounds of its own domain, to produce as consistently as possible a universal, synthetic form reflecting the temporal relationships of the age. This form, which will emerge as a new style in the near future, is currently being prepared throughout Europe and America.

As soon as the era of destruction gives way to the era of construction, there will be, more than ever before, an opportunity for artists in their respective fields to express a new sense of fraternity in a monumental manner.

I have spoken.

Leiden, November 1917.

NOTES:

1) I must point out that this movement was unoriginal and arbitrary, while the new movement today is original (in Holland for the first time!).

ANNOTATIONS WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

1. — The artist provides only the result of his purely optical observation of an animal. The primitiveness of this observation is evidenced by the lack of "values" (tonal values, shadows, and transitions). The observation is limited to the impression of the main form, which is summarized in uncertain lines. In this stage, silhouette drawing also frequently appears.



1. Primitive, physio-plastic drawing (Paleolithic culture)

2. — The artist primitively shapes his deeper, psychological perception. He does not depict his objects as they appear through optical observation, but as he imagines and feels them. He expresses an idea in a childishly primitive manner, not aesthetically but still effectively. As a result, the objects become a means rather than an end.



2. Primitive, ideoplastic drawing (Neolithic culture)

3. — By not starting from the figure, but from the space, the Egyptian embodies his concept of the universal—directly associated with his religious feelings—in a single monumental cubic form (cultivated ideo-plastic). Every intentional bodily detailing, as clearly evidenced by the treatment of the feet, etc., was omitted. The entire body is captured in a cubic closed form. As a result, the individual, particular does not dominate, but the Universal does. Three main depiction tempos can be distinguished: 1) pedestal; 2) middle or main mass; 3) head. Since this plastic art did not have an exclusively aesthetic intention and the attention had to be concentrated on the front, the back remained plastically expressionless. (see in this regard note: 29).



3. Egyptian Plastic.

4. — In contrast to Egyptian sculpture, here the emphasis is on the physical, particular, as evidenced by meticulous bodily sculpture (see also the treatment of details). Instead of monumental, it leans towards more detailed, picturesque sculpture. The sculptor focuses primarily on the beauty of the external form, which he cultivates (cultivated physio-plastic art). As a result, it did not give rise to monumental spatial sculpture through rhythmic grouping of volumes, but rather harmonious bodily sculpture, emphasizing physical rhythm and bodily beauty.



4. Greek relief. Greek deity on a throne

5.—A very beautiful example of late medieval ideoplastic art. Deliberate suppression of the physical, which is especially evident in the lower part of the "pseudo" body. There is a tendency towards rigidity and angularity of form and a deepening of colour (for the former, see the folds, the wings, the clouds, etc.). Suppression of the whimsical-natural. Overall, it is more the shape of an idea or "state" than a natural figure. However, this idea is not purely aesthetic, not purely visual, but religious, connected with the visual.



5. Cherub by Fra Angelico (Fresco decoration)

6. — In contrast to Fra Angelico, the emergence of the physical element.

Dominance of the natural, not only in the treatment of body details but also in the natural symmetry, particularly evident in the classical triangular composition concept. The decline of the religious idea. The rebirth of the Greek ideal of beauty, where the depiction is not as integrated with the representation as it is with Angelico. More deliberate, intellectually compositional. (According to measure and order).



6. Raphael. Holy Family

7. — Through Greek-Roman beauty culture, the dominance of physical plasticity is emphasized. (Physical rhythm and physical harmony). The destruction of the religious idea according to Christian mysticism. The merging of this with the pan-psychic worldview of the Hellenes. Instead of suppression (as with the Egyptians, Indians, medievals, etc.), arbitrary exaggeration of the physical construction with the help of science (perspective, anatomy, etc.), whereby the whimsical, fully grown natural even more dominates and enhances the character of earthly-bound plasticity in the entire conception (in the manner of sculpture). The advent of the baroque.

From the conflict between the spirit striving for freedom and the earthly-bound nature of this art, increased tragedy arises as a moment of personality.



7. Michelangelo. Fragment of the Last Judgment (Christ)

8. — Artistic expression in which the plasticity of the external culminates through Michelangelo. Entirely a painting in the manner of capricious naturalism. Very spirited but in conception less cohesive than Michelangelo, more loose, fluid, yet extremely arbitrary. Continuation and transmission of Baroque to the North. The personal element is externalized in the sensual-lyrical accent of this painting style.



8. Rubens. The Toilet of Venus

9. — Deepening of the external through the duality relationship: light and dark, which dominates the entire conception, both its external aspect, the objects, and its internal aspect, the emotional. The objectivity of the objects is, in climax (compare the early works like "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp" with later ones like "Homer," "The Jewish Bride," etc.), subordinated to a very clearly articulated painterly plasticity. Although considered by many—and not unjustly—as belonging to the Baroque, Rembrandt's art is dominated by compositional deliberation, to which natural reality, especially in the ripest, later works, was sacrificed. The painting "Homer" is already unmistakably "impressionistic" in its treatment, significantly bringing the meaning of the painting as such to the fore. No wonder, then, that this art and that of Vermeer of Delft and Frans Hals became a rich source for the modern painters around 1870.



9. Rembrandt. The Rest on the Flight into Egypt

10. — An example of 18th-century painting, in which the depiction fully conforms to the culture of the most external, reaching its pinnacle. The lack of depth in life and imaginative idea is replaced by the portrayal of the pronounced-emotional: the sentimental, precise representation of objects, and their material nature akin to photographic accuracy.



10. J. B. Gréuze (1725–1805) *The Morning Prayer*

11. — Return to Greek physioplastic art. Compositional consideration according to classical tradition: in the manner of symmetry. No depiction of reality. Theatrical idealism with a Greek-mythological content. Predominantly illustrative.



11. Neo-Classical. School of David (1748–1825). Mars Disarmed by Venus and the Graces

12. — The advent of Romanticism as a reaction to Neoclassicism. An example of painting where the depiction is entirely dominated by emotion, in accordance with the responsive spirit of the times, influencing the entire conception. Due to the desire for internalization, it is more akin to the art of Rembrandt than to that which directly preceded Romanticism: Neoclassicism, also known as pseudo-classicism. Due to its arbitrary and whimsical nature, it is related to the Baroque. Liberation from classical symmetry in grouping. Compared to the idealism of its predecessors, it is more realistic in the depiction of figures.

Through Eugène Delacroix, the Romantic mode of expression was strongly emphasized. Although Delacroix gave a new accent to colour, he often looked back to the past in terms of subject matter.



12. J. L. A. T. Géricault (1791–1824). The Raft of the "Medusa"

13. — Although initially influenced by Romanticism, Millet soon reacted against this art form by focusing more generally on humanity. Both in form (as representation) and in artistic content: the monumental expression of calm through the tightening and angularity of the contour and more clearly defined volumes reveal a desire for the universal (compare, for example, with Greuze). Due to the social-narrative emphasis, the goal of painting as a purely aesthetic-artistic expression is exceeded. Nevertheless, through the simplicity and sincerity of this art form, the painters' tendency to revert to the past (to Classicism and the Renaissance) is halted.



13. Millet (1814–1875) Man with a Hoe

14. — Similar to Millet and others, focusing on the more general in the manner of humanity. In the painting technique: carried through Rembrandtesque conception according to chiaroscuro. Realistic-romantic, with a strong lyrical accent, which is enhanced by the progressive element in the depiction. In the entire conception, there is a tendency towards abstraction, which manifests in the deliberate suppression of every detail, giving the objects a silhouette-like appearance, and the figures seem to blend into the atmosphere of the whole. This tendency towards abstraction is very far-reaching in Thijs Maris.



14. Honoré Daumier (1808-1879) The Emigrants

15. — In Manet, all the values already achieved in painting as the art of painting itself culminate. With Manet, painting enters a new phase. There is a more objective study of nature in the manner of painting: according to the relationship of light, colour, and tonal values (valeurs) for compositional balance. The depiction takes on a different meaning; it no longer forms an essential part of the painting, i.e., it is no longer intrinsically connected with the artistic idea. The depiction is dissolved. It gains a painterly significance: the significance of composition. Manet paints with more representation (**See footnote 1**), but already composition. For example, the nude figure in this painting is introduced as a "white note" in contrast to the "black note," the man in velvet on the right. The studio light (compare 11 to 14) has also disappeared, hence this school was named "plein-air art."



15. Edouard Manet (1833–1883) "Dejeuner sur l'herbe"

FOOTNOTES:

1) It is understandable that Manet (as later Van Gogh) had no objection to borrowing his compositions ("Le Dejeuner sur l'herbe") from Raphael or Giorgione.

16. — The Neo-Impressionists and Luminists consistently follow the direction set by Manet. For them, the material value of objects and generally the depiction become of even lesser significance. Form (thing) becomes equivalent to colour. colour becomes equivalent to light. Although they strive for greater specificity and purity of colour, colour retains its optical-naturalistic significance, meaning that natural light (often sunlight) is suggested through colour (primary colours, complementary effects). colour remains a means of depiction and not merely a representation. Seurat, Signac, and others sought a system to apply colours unmixed, in dots (pointillism), resembling a mosaic on the canvas, leaving the harmonious blending through optical effects — by viewing the painting from a certain distance — to the viewer. Thus, the viewer had to act more actively and creatively in response.



16. Georges Seurat (1859–91)

17. — Symbolism, of which Thorn Prikker is a prominent representative, was a counter-movement to Impressionism. The Symbolists emphasize the expression of the sensation they receive from a situation or condition. As such, we could describe Symbolism as a refined decorative ideoplasty (the same applies to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood). Since painting in particular, and visual art in general, aims to depict from the deepest reality in the manner of art, it is self-evident that "symbolizing," that is, expressing an idea through representation, would be unproductive and of no profound influence as an independent expression form of the "artistic idea."

In Symbolism, the false idealism of Romanticism reached its peak and end.



17. J. Thorn Prikker. Descent from the Cross

18. — The evolutionary process stemming from the Impressionist vision (Manet) continues with Paul Cézanne, reaching its pinnacle with him. Initially influenced by classicism and Romanticism, Cézanne begins to prepare the ground for a mathematical temperament (see page 18). Through meticulous study of nature, reflection begins to develop in painting, contrasting with Impressionism, along with a corresponding sense of style. Painting evolves into a new phase: the understanding that aesthetic beauty is a matter of balanced proportions. colour becomes the primary tool of painting par excellence. Line serves to define (to establish specificity in) tonal values. The material nature of objects (whether they are stone, wood, or glass) is completely disregarded, as all objects become equal through colour and geometric proportions. The personal element, the emotion, is not depicted through the subject matter, but is instead conveyed through colour ("Sensations colourées").



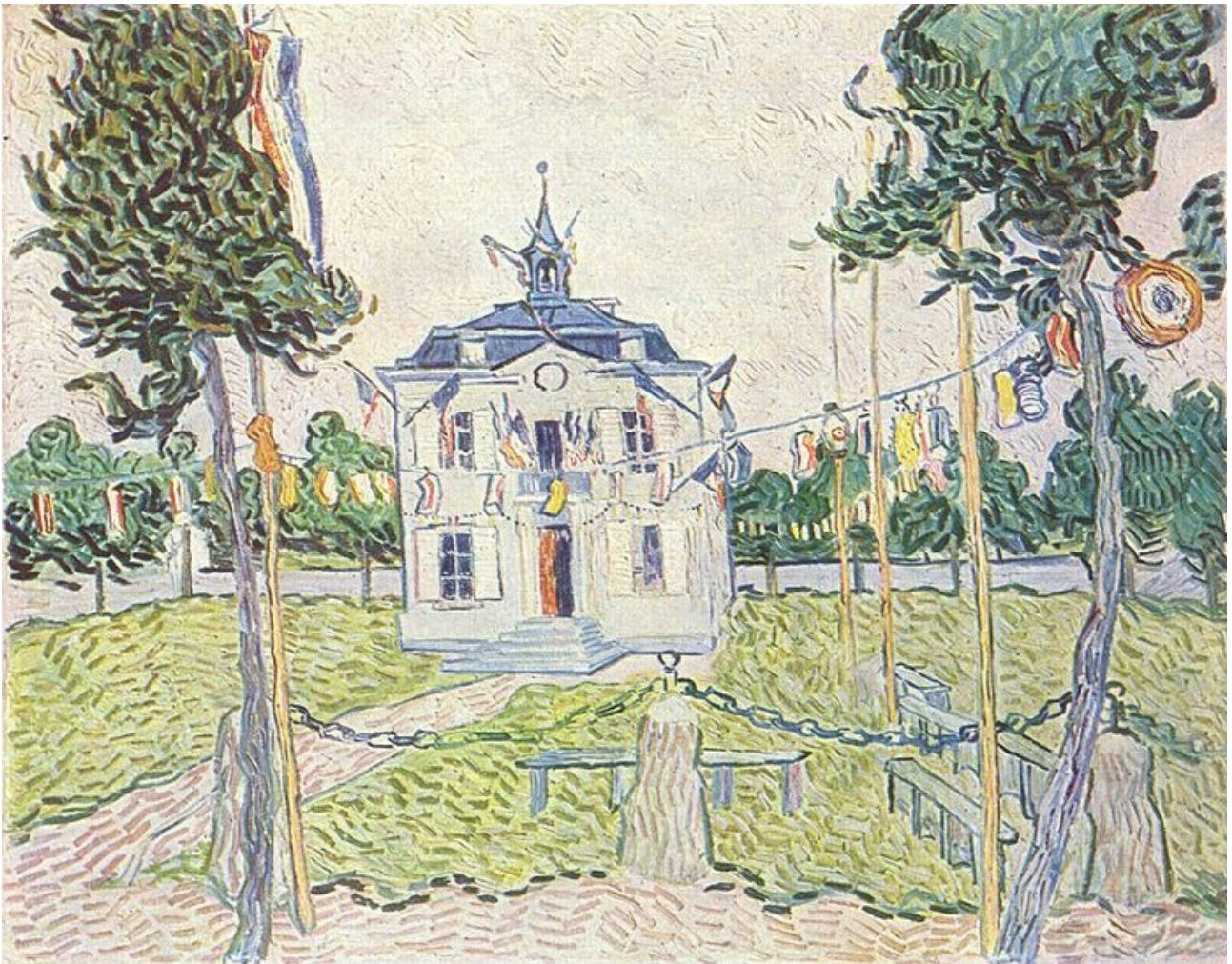
18. Paul Cézanne. Landscape

19. — The art of Van Gogh is the struggle between impression and expression, between empathy and abstraction. Although initially under the influence of realistic romantics (Millet, Daumier, L'Hermitte, among others) and the studio tone that accompanies it, Van Gogh, during his time in France, under the influence of Cézanne, Gauguin, and others, develops a more pictorial style. His colours deepen and become more flat, his contours tighter. Although not yet breaking away from naturalistic forms, Van Gogh intuitively, and in opposition to perspective, begins to upright table, chair, and floor planes. This is to meet the artistic demand to let the upright, harmonious element—of great importance in visual art—dominate, thereby achieving a harmonious, more balanced distribution and impact of planes without the distracting "gaps" in the composition.

(By harmony, I mean the "next-to-each-other" or upright element, as opposed to the melodic, the "successive" or ongoing element).

In some works like "My Bedroom," the flat, pure colour is introduced. Less objective and more subjective-emotional than Cézanne, Van Gogh does not transcend individual impression, which is why he mostly depicts pronounced tragedy and succumbs to it.

(Compare note of Michel Agniolo).



19. Vincent van Gogh. The Pavilion

20. — The art of the painter Henri Rousseau, le douanier, who is still largely unknown here, has had a significant influence on the ongoing development of painting. In his art, an intense tightening of form announces itself, indicating a deeper visual contemplation. Rousseau emphasizes the monumental in his treatment, with the dominant characteristic being the harmonious, upright element. Although the consistency of the principle of monumentality affects the entire conceptualization of imagery in works such as "The Sick," "The Storm," and others, a comparison with transitional works like those of Henri Rousseau is very interesting.



20. Henri Rousseau. The Poet G. Apollinaire and the Muse

21. — With Picasso begins the breaking of the bound natural form. This was necessary before painting could become an independent visual expression in its necessary evolutionary process (reflecting the evolution of the human mind). The contour tightened more and more, and from this tension in the contour, the breaking of the closed form naturally followed. The understanding of balanced proportion (see note on Cézanne) and the awareness of the upright element (see note on Van Gogh and Rousseau) now begin to manifest "in the manner of art" in the rhythmic grouping of planes. The value of the object becomes this: an occasion for reconstruction according to the visual experience. This recreates the (natural) given into visual composition.

Mockingly, this stage of painting (similarly to Impressionism in its time), which opposed the traditional view of seeing the artwork according to nature, was called "Cubism." Through Cubism, a new vision of nature — namely, one based on abstract visual values — was introduced.

Although the Cubists retained many old values (such as tone, sensitive line, etc.), they approached very closely the goal of painting, on which so many generations had worked: namely, to achieve an absolute visual art form for aesthetic experience.



21. Pablo Picasso. The Harlequin

22. — It goes without saying that there were also other paths leading to the same goal, just as it goes without saying that many painters considered this goal already achieved by continuing to work in the same manner as their predecessors. Some directions aimed at the same goal were Futurism and Expressionism. Futurism broke the constraint of natural form on different grounds and in a different manner. Supported by modern science in mechanics and mathematics, it breaks the "fixed viewpoint" and with it the tradition of (Italian) perspective. By adopting a constantly shifting, motoric viewpoint, Futurism introduces, alongside horizontal perspective, vertical or more precisely, continuously "changing" and "shifting" perspectives to express the continuity of moments in motion through time and space. It's a purely realistic tendency and the necessary consequence of observing moments of movement prompted by the modern urban landscape. This viewpoint, not from a stable perspective but from the sensation of simultaneous movements, led to "broken representation" and the expression of the influence and alteration of one object by another. Once the new concepts in mechanics, mathematics, the principle of relativity, etc., gain more popularity, the importance of the Futurist viewpoint will be increasingly appreciated.



22. Gino Severini. The Boulevard

23. — Through Impressionism, Kandinsky arrived at breaking the natural, organic unity, thus achieving a composition based on line and colour sensation. His colour gains more definition, although the broken line retains the whimsical nature of the natural contour. In contrast to Picasso, who emphasizes deliberation resulting in an organic construction of visual relationships, Kandinsky works more intuitively, conveying his aesthetic emotion through the sensation evoked by line and colour as expressive elements. As a result, this work retains elements of the arbitrary methods of Baroque art (e.g., Rubens) and lacks the essential conditions for a new style.

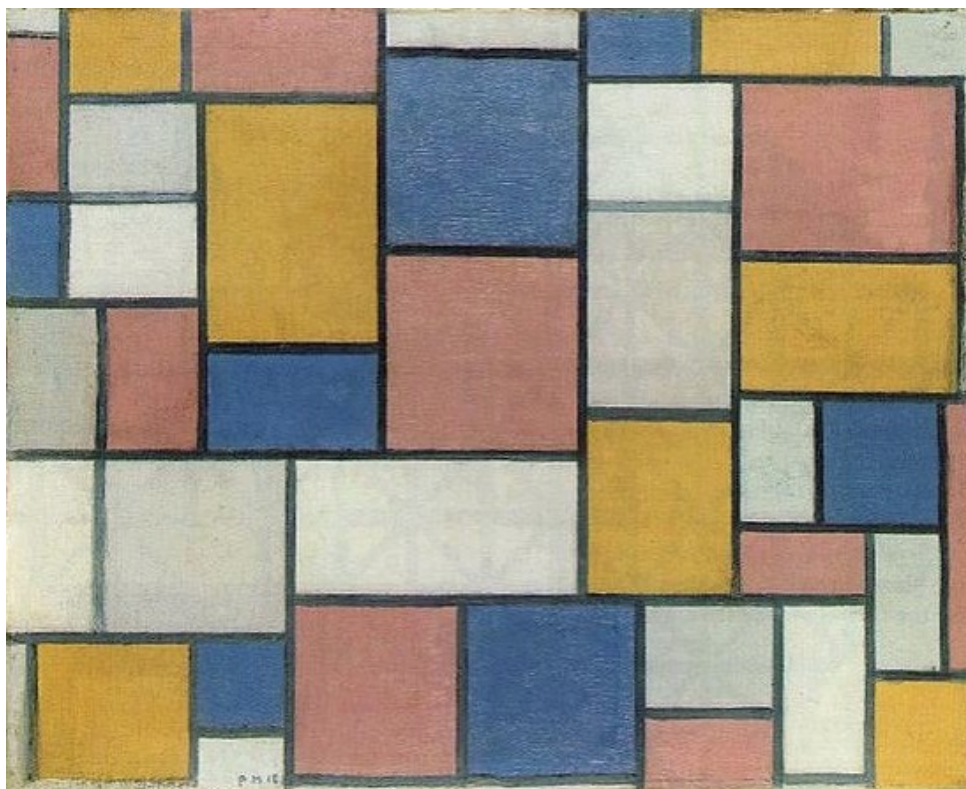


23. Kandinsky. Composition 6

24. — Where many painters in Holland, due to the war in Europe and the disruption of contact with foreign artistic energies, either reverted to or remained stuck in one of the new or outdated expressive possibilities such as Cubism, Expressionism, Impressionism, Symbolism, Romanticism — even pseudo-Classicism — in a few others, the influence of the general reform of the visual arts, caused by a new perspective arising from inner awareness, had a stronger impact. This resulted in the process of development towards the absolute pictorial form for the artistic idea and the inevitable dissolution of the old art form being carried out in utmost consistency on neutral ground. Thus, a small group of painters formed in Holland who, whether influenced by Picasso, Cézanne, or the art of Van Gogh, arrived at the destruction of natural form and thereby to a different purely flat pictorial solution of the painting.

This new mode of representation is the diametric opposite of painting entirely in the manner of nature: entirely in the manner of art, namely. On one hand, it represents the consistency of the artistic intention, which always aimed at achieving aesthetic harmony through balanced proportion, even if bound to the external natural form. On the other hand, it entails the radical abolition of traditional values such as natural colour, natural form, atmosphere, perspective, etc. The essence of this new form of representation — or rather, outcome of representation — of beauty can be defined as: directly shaping the aesthetic emotion, evoked by reality, through proportion (i.e., with the means of representation itself, instead of the means of nature).

Thus begins the culture of the painting. Although developing somewhat simultaneously in a few individuals through painting from nature, this new mode of representation received its first powerful impetus from Piet Mondrian (1913). Also, in B. van der Leek, Vilmos Huszár, Th. van Doesburg, around the same time, a painting style of pure proportion developed out of free painting from nature.



24. Piet Mondrian. Composition (1918)

25. — In the new mode of representation, shades of personality can also be observed, as evidenced by images 24 to 28.

In the later works of Van der Leek, the monumental sense of space, already evident in earlier works such as "The Sickness," "The Storm," "Loading a Ship," etc., developed in a "destructive" manner, i.e., into purely flat, spatial, and colour relationships. Opposite to the loose painting, which justifies its existence based on the autonomy of representation in itself, the significance of modern, monumental painting can only come into its own in and with modern neutral architecture, as a counterpoint to the purely constructive nature of architecture. It depends solely on the pure development—i.e., toward purely relational construction—whether the loose painting ("tableau de chevalet") will still be defensible in the near future.

The emphasis in Van der Leek's recent works lies primarily on purely painterly spatial effects through nothing but Ratio.

It is important to note that the desire for a monumental painting fused with architecture is becoming increasingly prominent.



25. B. van der Leek. Painting

26 and 27. — Important for the development from earlier painting to the new (flat) mode of representation is comparing these two works with each other and Composition III (City) with Severini's Boulevard. In 26, we encounter a fusion of Cubism and Luminism. The light, gradually developing from the darkness of the background, also gives the representation a somewhat vague appearance due to its atmospheric veiling. Although the forms maintain constant balance in their interrelation and rotational movement around the perpendicular axis, the entire conception still maintains a natural-organic coherence, wherein it can be observed that the plasticity still appears somewhat in the manner of nature.

In 27, on the other hand, the vagueness has given way to greater specificity of rectangular planes, which, despite the compelling rhythmic movement, are in balance more in the manner of art (i.e., through mutual proportion). The organic closedness has been replaced by the "open," "loose," and "flat," which is purely modern and allows the character of the bustling cityscape with its changing perspectives to be expressed in an abstract manner (compare with Severini's "The Boulevard").



26. Vilmos Huszár. Painting in Yellow (1916)



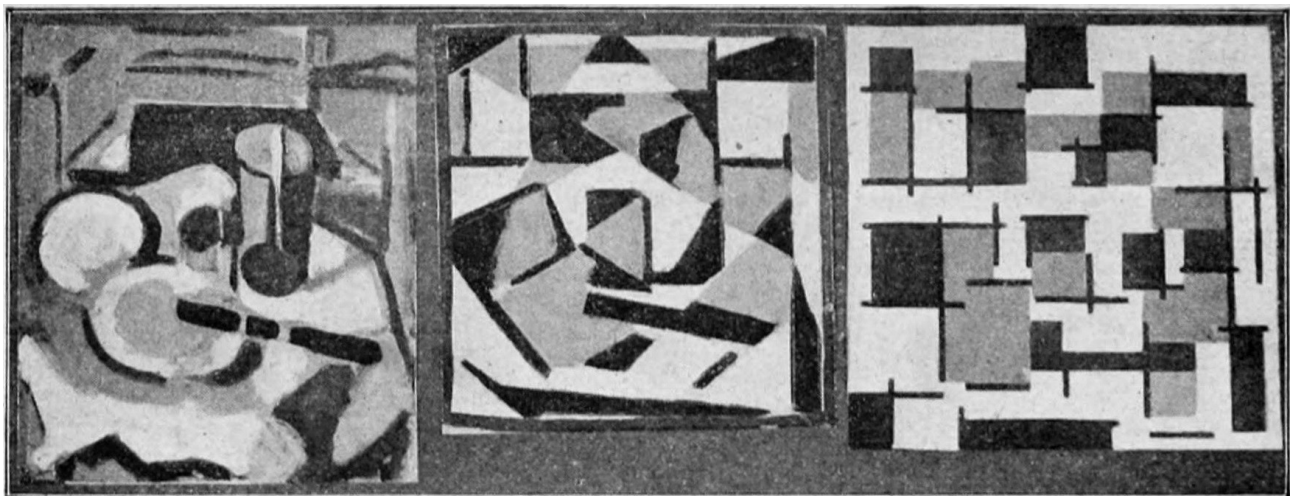
27. Vilmos Huszàr. Composition III (City) 1917

28. — Figure 28 shows three moments in the depiction of a modern painting: 1, 5, and 9. While there are three stages between 1 and 5 and between 5 and 9, it can be useful to compare these three moments to understand the new mode of depiction. These correspond to each other as impression, expression, and depiction.

1 depicts a study of the specific subject that led to composition 9. Although in the initial sketch (impression), the focus is on the pictorial relationships (horizontal versus vertical, vertical versus diagonal, diagonal versus circular, etc.), and the material reality of the objects is pushed into the background, this painting remains tied to observed objects; thus, it is still a composition "according to nature."

5 represents a further stage of depiction from 1. Here, the attempt is to move from the relationships observed in the impression towards a more balanced relationship of mutually influencing and interpenetrating planes by straightening the contours and deepening the colour into flatness. The space, instead of being perspectival-natural, achieves a more pictorial effect across the entire plane.

9 shows the final depiction resulting from transformation and reinterpretation. In the rectangular depiction plane, both colour and line are brought to a definitive state through extreme straightening, aiming to express the pictorial idea through balanced relationships "according to art," liberated from the whimsical nature of the natural objects seen in 1. Any addition or subtraction of a line or plane in this concept would disrupt the balance of the composition.



1

5

9

28. Th. van Doesburg. Three Depiction Moments of a Composition

29, 30, 31, and 32. — Sculpture (20th century).

As a reaction to impressionistic sculpture — where plasticity was expressed in the manner of natural whimsy — the art of Alex. Archipenko of Russia is one of the strongest expressions. What "Flat" is in painting, "Volume" is in sculpture. This involves a representation in three dimensions. It was not possible to solve the problem of representation in three dimensions purely through proportions in a naturalistic manner. The difficulty of the problem mainly lies in making the three dimensions (height, width, depth) equivalent — that is, to represent them — through the proportion of volumes to each other, by transferring the proportions. In classical and neoclassical sculpture, this ideal was pursued, although in the free-standing figure, one or sometimes two of the dimensions came to represent the artistic expression, with frontal dominance usually prevailing. There was also an effort to achieve a three-dimensional representation through multiplication (Trajan's Column, etc.). In the manner of nature, this led to the most absurd solutions (see Carpeaux's dance, for example). The first aesthetic solution, where volumes truly led to an artistic conception (not just body/muscle volumes), came in the 20th century with Archipenko, Boccioni, Brancusi, and others. For the sculptor who sees in terms of sculpture, the Image is primarily a spatial argument. He recognizes only volumes in relation to emptiness. His task is to bring these two into aesthetic rapport, into balance, into harmony. Technically speaking, we could say that the volumes balance themselves around the centre of gravity, equally in all dimensions. This is sculpture. This fundamental concept of sculpture, present to varying degrees in all sculptors, naturally exposes the absurdity of so-called "wood" and "bas-reliefs," which approach the essence of painting due to their conception towards the plane. Likewise, all sculpture (anti-monumental), concerned with pictorial effects of light and dark, colour, and tone.



29. Alex. Archipenko. The Kiss



30. J. B. Carpeaux. The Three Graces



31. Brancusi. M'lle Pogany



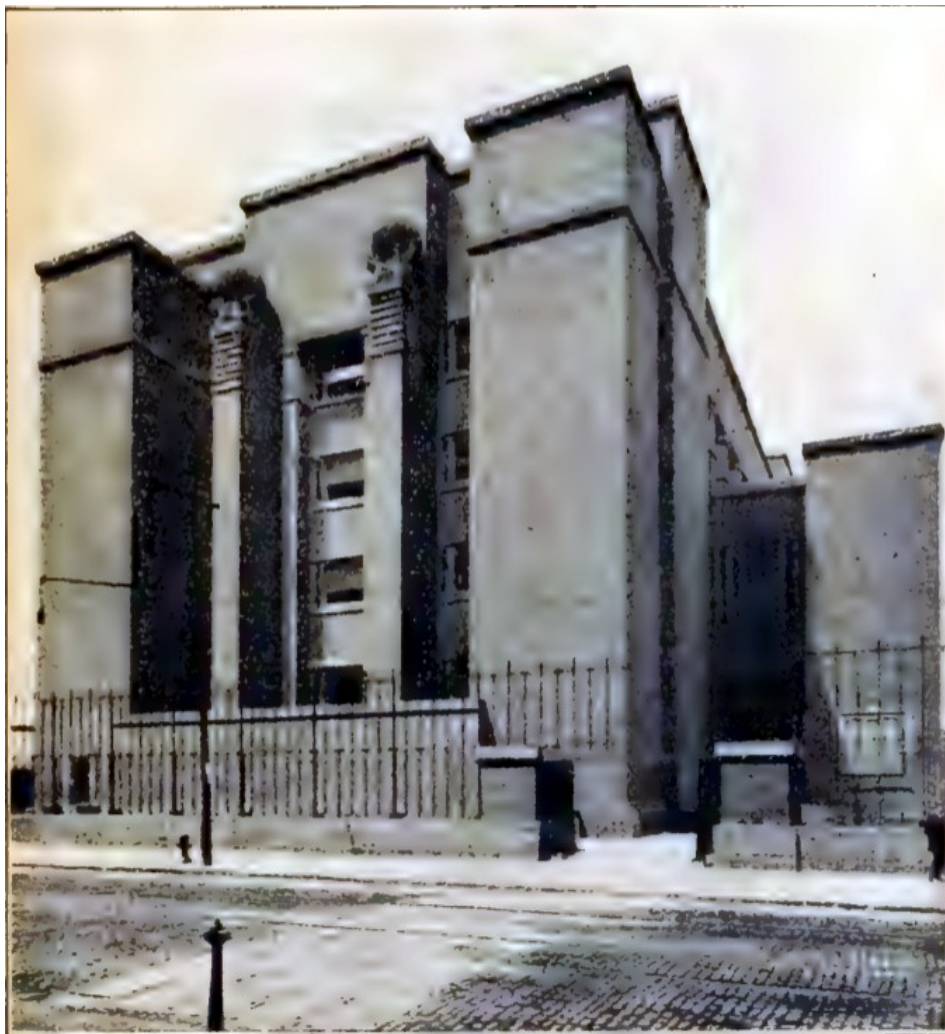
32. G. Vantongerloo. Small Sculpture

33, 34, 35, and 36. — Architecture (20th century).

The gradual emergence of the Style of Proportion in modern architecture is evidenced by the development that architecture underwent as a reaction to decorative architecture and archaism stemming from Baroque-Rococo. This development was more an unwinding, a departure from classical and pseudo-classical forms through simplification.

The new principles of construction, established by Semper, Viollet-le-Duc, Dr. Cuypers, Sullivan, and Dr. Berlage, were consistently carried forward in the works of Wagner, Peter Behrens, and others. In America, Frank Lloyd Wright, supported by new methods, achieved significant expressive heights, a new, anti-classical, yet not universally monumental, representation of the House.

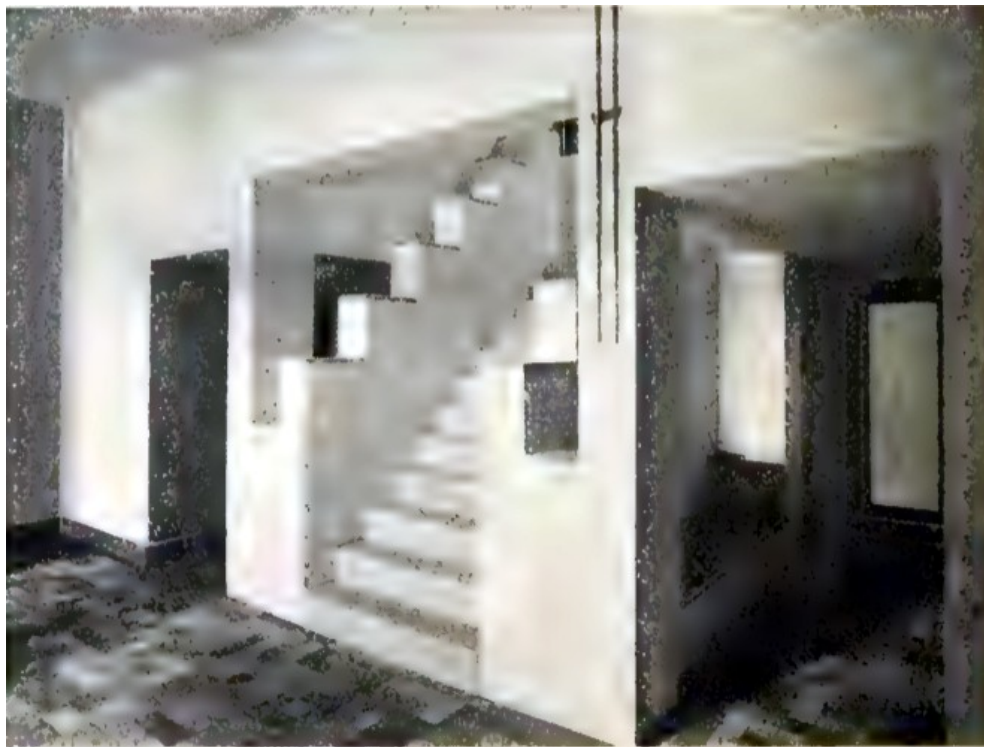
While in our country, on one hand, the last throes of Gebaerdemayer and the arbitrary (decorative) anti-constructive, pictorial architecture can be observed, on the other hand, some young architects are ready to introduce a new architecture based on constructive-aesthetic proportion, devoid of all arbitrary and decorative tendencies. Some examples of this can be seen in illustrations 34, 35, 36, and 38.



33. Frank Lloyd Wright. Larkin Administration Building



34. Rbt. van 't Hoff. Country House in Huis ter Heide



35. J. J. P. Oud. Hall in Vacation House in Noordwijkerhout



36. Jan Wils. Hotel in Woerden

37, 38, and 39. — Applied Arts.

The new consciousness of artistic expression brings with it the aspiration to elevate architecture to a monumental style through the collaboration of all plastic arts on the basis of balanced proportion.

Whether this will completely negate the "free" painting remains to be seen with time and the evolution of home culture itself. For now, it is settled that no style can emerge without a proportional division of labor concerning the various arts. That is to say, if the theories proclaimed by significant architects themselves are not put into practice, and if the architect does everything related to colour and form (by which I mean sculptural plasticity) alone, no style can emerge. Each art demands the whole person, including architecture, painting, and sculpture. The ancients understood this well, hence the possibility of style through proportional division of labor. Only when this is better understood will there be talk of monumental style architecture in the purest sense of the word. The concept of applied arts as something between art and practice will then naturally disappear. Art arises from the representation of inner life, regardless of what it is, and since the inner life of the house consists of its practical function and art-based relationships (balanced proportion, harmony), all that belongs to the house, in practice and in construction-based relationships, can lead to the most aesthetically beautiful results, provided that architects, painters, sculptors, etc., do not force their imaging limits.

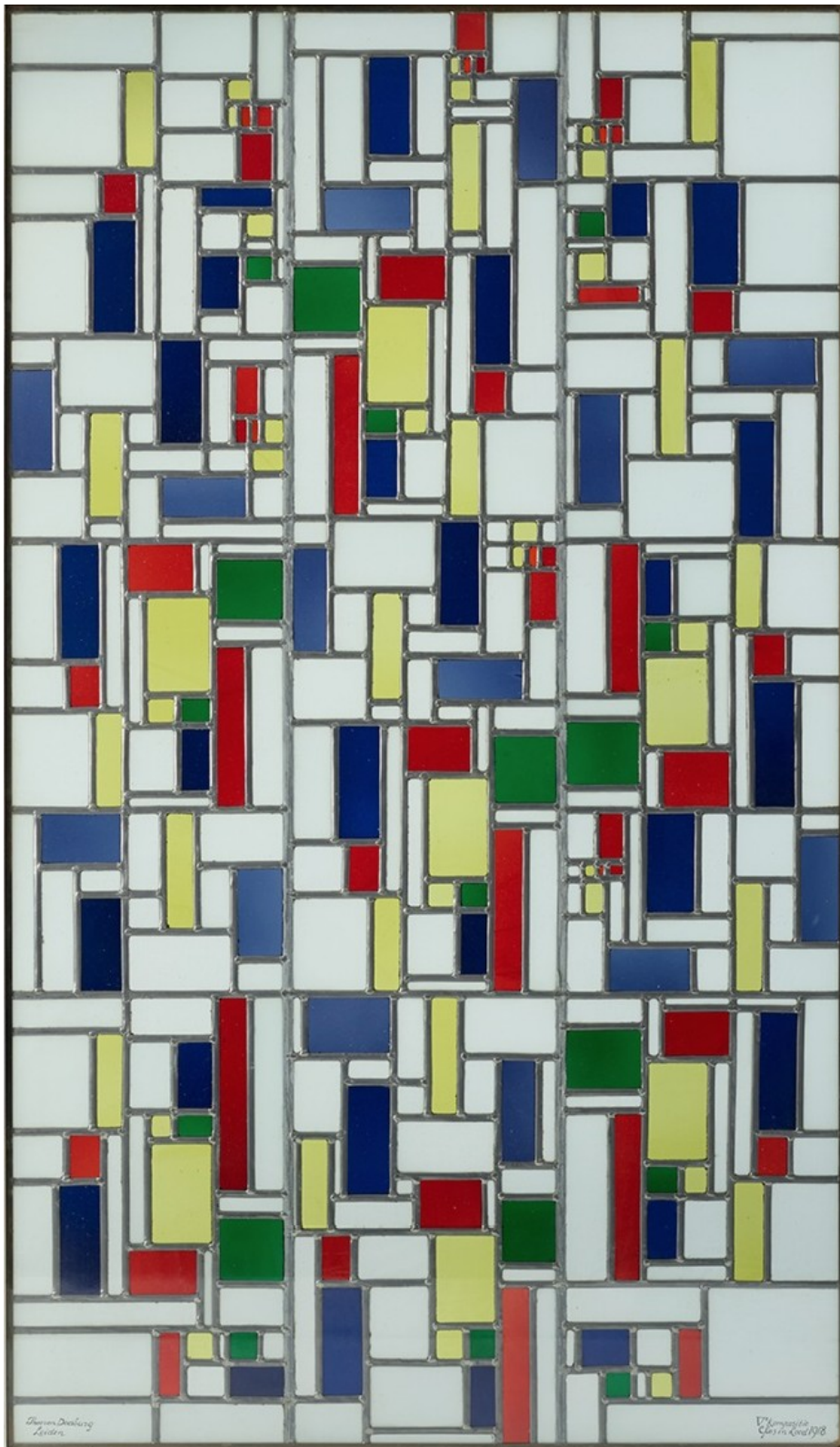
By interpreting applied arts as art in relation to architecture, the subordinate decorative nature (the integration of construction with an exterior decoration) is removed from applied arts. A few examples of this effort can be seen in illustrations 37-39. Illustrations 38 and 35 perhaps better highlight the spatial effect of the destructive tile floor composition in a neutral, monumentally plastic conception than illustration 37, which shows an independent fragment of this floor.



37. Th. van Doesburg. Tile floor composition in a vacation house in Noordwijkerhout



38. J. J. P. Oud. Upper hall in Vacation House in Noordwijkerhout. (Colour and floor composition by Th. van Doesburg)



39. Theo van Doesburg. Composition V, stained glass
